

# Queering the Writing Center: Shame, Attraction, and Gay Male Identity

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May, 2016

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In this thesis, the author presents analysis of interviews with 7 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) writing center consultants presented through the analytical frameworks of queer and affect theory. By focusing specifically on two of the interviews with gay male consultants, this thesis discusses how the performance or expression of LGBTQ gender and sexual identities within writing center sessions at times both negatively and positively affects consulting methods and the session as a whole. Along with gender and sexuality, the thesis discusses how feelings of same-sex attraction and shame, stemming from their LGBTQ identities, affected consultants and sessions in varying ways. The thesis concludes with strategies to use in helping to facilitate professional development conversations around issues and concerns that LGBTQ consultants may have. The conclusion also critiques the idea of a safe space that is commonly used in diversity training, and instead presents the tenets of a brave space.



Queering the Writing Center:

Shame, Attraction, and Gay Male Identity

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Department of English

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts

In English

By

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May, 2016

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Dr. Caswell: I want to thank you for helping me along a process that at times has felt like it would never come to a close. Thank you for the hours you spent reading and responding to emails, chapter drafts, and text messages. You have always been extremely kind and patient with me, but also willing to say “no” when it was best for me. From the time you hired me at the writing center as a second-year undergraduate your love for everything writing centers has been infectious. I look forward to our many years of friendship and collaboration that are to come.

To Dr. Banks: Where should I even start!? From the 4 courses I have taken with you over my graduate career to showing me around London on our study abroad trip to providing me with a laptop in which I typed a majority of this thesis, your friendship and mentorship has been unwavering. Thank you for always providing sound critique and for helping me understand the fascinating ins and outs of queer theory. Not only were you always there for me academically and personally, you did it while making me laugh. I’m looking forward to all the trouble we will cause together in the future.

To Dr. Cox: I remember meeting with you at Starbucks about two years ago to go over how to write a personal statement for graduate school! From the beginning of this process to the end of it, you have been a consistent mentor and friend. Not only am I grateful for your support to me, I am also indebted to your contributions to the field of queer rhetoric. Without your theoretical concept of “Working Closets,” my thesis wouldn’t be nearly as successful as it is today.

To Robbie: You have put up with me talking about (and at times complaining about) this thesis for over the last year, so thank you. Whether it was late night writing sessions or feeling overwhelmed with it all, you were there for me every step of the way. I couldn’t ask for a better

partner in life, and without you I'm not sure if I would have made it through the grueling days of writing this. I love you to the moon and back my dear.

To Korra (my fierce dog): We have spent many mornings and afternoons together while I hammered away on the keyboard, and you always kept me company. Your constant desire to play was always (well most of the time) a good distraction from work. Thanks for being a crazy companion.

Mom: There's too much to say in this format, but I'll give it a go. Thanks for always helping me to believe that I can do anything I put my mind to. Even since I was young, you put up with my constant need to talk, explain, and ask questions. Thanks for helping to make me curious about the world. I honestly believe that without your intelligence as an example, I would not be the critical thinker and writer that I am today. Most importantly, though, thanks for showing me just how important hard work is.

Summer: A brother couldn't ask for a better sister or friend. Living together during the first year of graduate school was truly a blessing. You took on so much of the household responsibilities, and after 12 hour days on campus it was always relaxing to not have to worry about the state of the house. More importantly though, you always had my back whether it was making me laugh when I was stressed or making sure I got to campus on time when we shared a car. Remember, blood will always and forever be thicker than water.

Family, friends, and loved ones: While I didn't talk with most of you about the specifics of this project, you were always supportive. More importantly though, thanks for helping me believe that I could complete such an arduous task.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

It was another weekday night in the writing center during the spring semester 2012, and I was waiting for my 7 p.m. session to begin. As a second-year undergraduate, I had only been working at my campus writing center for a few months. I was finally becoming comfortable working with student writers, as well as with my fellow consultants, other staff members, and with the center's environment. The writer showed up just before her appointment, and we went ahead and got started. I asked the student about the assignment and after a few minutes of conversation, I began to read the assignment aloud. As I processed what I was saying, my voice fumbled. My thoughts raced, and my clammy palms made the paper difficult to hold. I had 100 thoughts in 30 seconds: traditional fight-or-flight.

In the moment, I was not sure what I was feeling; I just knew that her paper was deeply affecting me on an individual level. I was blindsided both by the content of the paper and the way in which my body and mind recoiled and protested. This paper, which argued Lady Gaga's song "Born this Way" was illogical because God would never create or love a gay person, demanded both my personal and professional attention. Since I was still in the process of coming out, I knew the session was going to be an opportunity to have an open dialogue or contribute to developing more prejudice. I did my best to recover and helped the student to understand that there were a host of Christians that did not feel this way about the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community. In essence, she was completely missing one side of this debate.

Fast forward two years. I am in my first year of graduate school in the English program at the same institution. I am working in the First-Year Writing Studio, a branch of our main writing center that serves students enrolled in our FY composition sequence, when an instructor storms through our door loudly lecturing two black, male students who followed sheepishly behind her. As she yells at them, an endless stream of frustration, I hear her say that we will help “fix” their writing. Reacting strongly against the idea that they are somehow deficient, and the overall way she is treating the students--in front of a group of 4 other people no doubt--I stand up and curtly inform her how we are not a remedial, punishing place and how I didn’t appreciate her tone of voice. After muttering a few other things, she leaves. I go over to one of the students, and throughout our session do my best to console him and denounce the way that she had treated him.

The above stories--and many others not listed here--are always with me and just on the periphery of my consciousness while I work with student writers and other consultants. They remind me at times that the most important professional development opportunities a writing consultant can have is hands-on experience with writers that is then carefully thought about, reflected upon, and possibly shared with other consultants informally during the work day or with more formal chats at staff meetings or professional development sessions. This trend of sharing, remembering, and learning from our own and others’ stories is also reflected in the literature published about writing centers. One doesn’t have to look far in the latest writing center book, article, or training manual to see that we as a field value the reflective practice of telling and learning from stories (Okawa et al., 1991; Yancey, 1998; Bell, 2001; Danielewicz, 2001; Hammerness et al., 2005; Alsup, 2006; Mattison, 2007; Bright, 2013). Although there are a tons of stories to tell, many of them tend to deal with strong, deeply felt and bodily expressed

emotions either on behalf of the writer, the consultants, the professor, or any combination of the three. From the student writer who is fuming at their teacher for their last grade to the consultant who feels guilty because of the inaccurate information they gave the last writer--not to mention the emotional connection many people have to writing--the work of writing center consultants and staff is constantly done while navigating both their own and others feelings, emotions, and affects. If nothing more, writing centers are places that are full of emotional and affective interactions. Not many writing center professionals would argue against the fact that emotions are common in one-on-one interactions between students and writers, but these same professionals would be hard-pressed to describe the ways in which the field of writing center studies has engaged with emotion and affect, whether that be in the context of professional development for consultants, sustained and specific research studies on consultant and writer emotion, or just a general understanding of the ways that emotion impacts writing center tutorials. This lack of attention on emotions is specifically addressed in a recent call for submissions to a special issue of *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* focused on the affective aspect of writing center work. The call states: "Yet in a literature rich with examinations of the cognitive, pedagogical, political, and ethical dimensions of interacting with writers, the affective dimension of writing centers often goes unaddressed or is deemed secondary to other concerns." This statement is underscored by the fact that in the over 35 years of articles published by *The Writing Center Journal* my keyword search for "emotion" only yielded 25 results, with many having only a tenuous connection to emotion at best. This thesis, then, seeks to address the lack of research and attention paid to the impact of emotions and affect in writing center work particularly in the minority population of gay male writing center consultants, in hopes of providing a needed discourse to understand the emotional nature of both

writing and helping people improve their writing. Specifically, this thesis considers what a queer approach to affect might offer writing centers especially in terms of emotions and expressions of certain types of identity expression that are easily written off by some within the field as counterproductive, negative, and even inappropriate.

This thesis will focus mainly upon the experiences (collected through interviews) of two gay male consultants who work in the same writing center, with smaller anecdotes and experiences from five other LGBTQ consultants. The stories and experiences analyzed will focus on the affects (or *emotions*, but more about the distinction between the two later) of shame and attraction. I will explore shame (Chapter 3) and attraction (Chapter 4) individually in an attempt to explain how each of these affects influenced the consultants' abilities to work with writers. Before jumping into the affects, Chapter 2 will detail the methods, methodology, and literature I used to make sense of and code the interviews I conducted. Chapter 3 will explore how shameful feelings in the writing center impacted both consultants, and how this seemingly negative emotion can be used as a heuristic tool to learn about writing center work. Chapter 4 will discuss the taboo and rarely talked about implications of what experiencing same-sex attraction in the writing center means for gay male consultants and the writers they work with. Lastly, Chapter 5 will bring together the two individual cases in an attempt to make larger claims about the usefulness of understanding affect and queer theory in the writing center. Overall, this thesis seeks to answer the following research questions: 1) How does experiencing shame or attraction in the context of a writing center session impact, if at all, the writing center session? And, 2) How can a queer theoretical reading of emotion/affect influence writing center work? In the rest of this chapter, I will introduce the study, queer and affect theory, which are the two major

theoretical frameworks for this project, and then discuss how each theory has been taken up within writing center studies and its adjacent fields, such as rhetoric and composition.

### **The Study**

In fall 2014, I conducted 7 interviews with LGBTQ consultants to discuss the ways in which their gender and sexual identities impact their work with writers. After obtaining IRB permissions, I asked the conference directors and LGBTQ Special Interest Group (SIG) leaders of the 2014 International Writing Centers Association/National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (IWCA/NCPTW) for permission to recruit participants from the LGBTQ SIG. During the SIG, I gave a brief overview of my research ideas in-person, and I also posted a recruitment message to the conference's Facebook page. Of the seven LGBTQ-identified writing center consultants, I interviewed, five interviewees identified as gay; one as lesbian; and one as bisexual. Out of the seven interviews, five were conducted in-person at the conference headquarters, while two were conducted after the conference over Google Hangout. I collected demographic information such as age, race, and gender identity, along with institutional affiliation and number of semesters spent working in a writing center. To be eligible for this study, participants had to be at least 18 years-old and be currently working in a writing center.

These interviews were originally conducted for a research project in a graduate level research methods course about gay male consultants and their experiences around issues of gender and sexual identity within the writing center. Thus, the interview questions I asked solely pertained to how these aspects of identity (gender/sexuality) impacted the LGBTQ consultants' work with writers and other staff members in the writing center. For this thesis, though, I am reanalyzing the results of these interviews through the lens of both gender and sexuality (queer theory) as well as emotions and affect (affect theory). These theories together provide a richer



picture and more thorough analytical framework for understanding how the complexities of identity and emotion/affect play out in writing center interactions between consultant and writer.

Because I was interested in collecting, understanding, analyzing, and reinterpreting the stories and experiences of gay male writing center consultants, a qualitative research method (interviews) provided a rich site for data. I specifically selected interviews because they allow me the opportunity to focus on the stories and lived experiences of a small sample size with greater attention to detail. Through an analysis of the stories and experiences of individuals, I am able to paint a more detailed picture of the complex ways that gender/sexuality and affect inform the daily work of gay male writing center consultants. During my original analysis of the data, I noticed two broad categories of interviewee experiences: those who feel that their sexuality/gender impacts their writing center sessions and those who feel that their sexuality/gender doesn't impact sessions. For the purposes of this thesis, I have selected one interviewee from each of these broader categories in order to explore those interviews in detail and to suggest theoretical categories that may prove useful to other researchers who are interested in beginning similar interview projects with LGBTQ-identified participants. Likewise, because these two interviewees work in the same writing center, while they can make no claims to universality, they offer two compelling ways of seeing the same writing center space. Given the paucity of research in writing center scholarship that explores the voices and lived experience of LGBTQ consultants as well as the lack of writing center literature that explores affect, I believe this thesis study offers future researchers options for thinking about both why studying LGBTQ consultants and emotions/affect is important and how we might go about asking meaningful questions about these issues. By analyzing their stories, I hope to highlight just some

of the emotional interactions that two members of the gay community have had within a particular writing center.

## **Queer Literature**

### **What is Queer Theory?**

My attempt here to briefly define a complex, multifaceted, theoretical tradition that has and does continue to change, move, and shift will ultimately fail. In my attempt to statically define a theory which at its core detests categorization, labels, and stasis, I will only be presenting a fractured and incomplete version of events. What I hope though, is that in this brief chunk of text, I can give at least a partial introduction to the time period which helped shape queer theory and an overview of some tenets that underpin queer theory. This introduction to some of the major components of queer theory, such as its activist history, the importance of performativity, and the need to disrupt binaries will allow me the needed discourse to discuss LGBTQ identities, and their relation to affect and emotion, within writing centers and to disrupt the problematic binary logic of “good” and “bad” writing center practices that structure the way we look at sessions and assessment. A good place to start a discussion of queer theory, is to look at the societal and historical time that produced it.

From the beginning, queer theory has been closely associated with AIDS activism. Queer theory’s activist roots and its incessant call for change is a major tenet of modern instantiations of this theory. During the 80s and 90s, which was the time period that queer theory emerged, the body count of the AIDS crisis in America continued to rise and the government continued not to recognize the crisis, thus many organizations and people began to demand and raise awareness (Jagose, 1996; Sullivan, 2003; Hall, 2003). Two of these activist organizations ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) and Queer Nations are important in that they “provided a link

between a radical activist consciousness and the radical theorizations that would come to be known as ‘queer theory’” (Hall, 2003, p. 52-3). As a result of public demonstrations conducted by groups such as ACT UP and Queer Nation, such as “kiss-ins, leaflet and manifesto distributions” (p. 53) these groups, and the many others not listed here, began to reclaim the word queer from its negative, homophobic uses and instead used it “to celebrate, rather than castigate, difference from the ‘norm’ at a time when the oppressiveness and implicit violence of that norm was clear and undeniable” (p. 54). Thus, this battle for the reclamation of *queer*, which occurred in society by LGBTQ and AIDS activists, began to influence and infiltrate the academy, and as academics began to make sense of and theorize about these happenings queer theory began to take place (Hall, 2003). One of the first uses of the term “queer theory” happened in a “special issue of the feminist journal *differences*” (Hall, 2003, p. 55) which was edited by Teresa de Lauretis and published in 1991. In the first essay of the issue Sue-Ellen Case argues that queer theory is not about gender or sexuality, but that it is about a shift in ontology. That is, queer theory is “‘a kind of activism that attacks the dominant notion of the natural. The queer is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny’ (3)” (as cited in Hall, 2003, p. 55).

This brief slice of history is vitally important to understanding a basic premise of queer theory, which is that although LGBTQ studies and identities were and are vital to queer theory, it is about something more than a single group of people or topic. As Case (1991) argues, it is about a shift in how people should approach the world and not only about gender or sexuality. The important takeaway from Case (1991)’s article is that LGBTQ studies and queer theory are not exactly the same. Instead, queer theory--and its many instantiations, branches, and applications--asks people to, question, and interrogate any venerated and/or established normative practice or assumption, not just gender or sexuality; it seeks to find meaning in

alternate ways of being and living in the world. In other words, a queer approach to the world is one that resists “regimes of the normal” (Warner, 1993, xxvi). This resistance of powerful normative systems and the need to disrupt them, is a continuation of queer theory’s social activist roots that sought to call attention to and change the government’s stance towards the AIDS crisis.

### **Queer Writing Center Literature.**

Throughout the history of writing center scholarship, researchers and administrators have been interested in understanding how differing identities and roles play out in sessions (Trimbur, 1987; Healy, 1991; Harris, 1995; Mick, 1999; Laterell, 2000; Yancey, 2002; Denny, 2005, 2013; Watson, 2012; Bright, 2013). This ongoing discussion of identity, however, has consistently overlooked the sexual and gender identity of LGBTQ individuals. In fact, Jay Sloan and Andrew Rihn’s (2013) annotated bibliography of LGBTQ writing center research shows that after over 30 years of research, only 14 articles explore LGBTQ issues in the context of the writing center. So, while writing centers themselves occupy marginal places within institutions, they still often reproduce the heteronormative and hegemonic structures of the institutions in which they operate. In this section, I explore the LGBTQ writing center scholarship that has informed the current research study and demonstrate important areas of additional research.

In *Queering the Writing Center*, Harry Denny (2005) writes, “Sexuality is another lens through which we must view the writing center, but it is an interpretive gaze that has received little attention in writing center theory and practice” (p. 42). To address this omission, Denny argues that queer theory and its privileging of marginalized identities and its complicating of binaries can be useful for exploring identities in writing center sessions. He applies the terms *passing* and *coming out*, which are usually associated with the LGBTQ community, to writing centers in order to demonstrate how a queer lens might help us to better understand the types of

marginalization that writing centers experience. Just as sexual minorities and certain people of color have felt compelled to pass as straight or as more white, writers come to centers “wanting to learn those skills, markers, and insights that enable them to pass in the academy” (p. 51).

Denny argues that centers should help students learn how to incorporate their home discourse appropriately into academic discourse, therefore operating in a third space. Also, writers come to centers and have to come out by speaking into existence their problems with writing. He argues that tutors can help students in this coming out process by sharing with students their own struggles with academic discourse.

Denny (2005) is not the only piece of scholarship to argue that the writing center’s often times marginalized institutional status is beneficial to all people, but especially those of minority identities. Two other writers, Jonathan Doucette (2012) and Stephen Jukuri (2000), also view the writing center as a queer and subversive space because it asks writers and tutors, who are full of different discourses and identities, to explore these differences in order to strengthen their identity and abilities as writers. Doucette (2012) tells a story about helping a student to recognize the importance of including a personal narrative about her gay brother, who was the inspiration behind her paper on gay marriage, into what was previously a purely factual paper. He envisions the writing center as a place of partial resistance to the “codes of the academy” (p. 14). Jukuri (2000) critically reflects on sessions with three writers, one of which he considered coming out to. By viewing the writing center as a site of “productive possibilities” because it is not “institutionalized as tightly as the classroom,” he uses his article to think through and reflect on each session and how both his and the writers’ different subject positions affected the session dynamics. Denny (2005), Doucette (2012), and Jukuri (2000) all apply Michel Foucault’s theory of third voice in “Discourse on Language” to writing center sessions, although Jukuri (2000) is

the only one to directly cite him. That is, all three authors think the writing center has the potential to be a site of subversion by operating somewhere in between Foucault's first voice (the Institution), and his second voice (Inclination). The first voice represents the powerful, discourse-controlling university or institution a writing center belongs to, while the second voice belongs to individuals and their desire for complete freedom in choosing what discourse to use. Therefore, by operating in between these two voices (or spaces), the writing center can become a place where writers learn how to subvert the imposed institutional discourse by including their own, more personal discourse. An example of this subversion at work is illustrated in Doucette's (2012) discussion of his session about gay marriage, which was mentioned above.

While the writing center community has discussed LGBTQ issues in terms of how session can be sites of identity negotiations between institutional and personal discourses, LGBTQ identities and concerns have, from time to time, been mentioned as one issue among many in scholarship devoted to issues of racism, oppression, or identity politics more generally. In Lauren Greenfield and Karen Rowan's (2011) *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change*, two chapters, which seek to explore how writing centers can address issues of racism, include LGBTQ stories or narratives as asides to the overall focus of both chapters. In "Bold: The Everyday Writing Center and the Production of New Knowledge in Antiracist Theory and Practice," Anne Ellen Geller, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, explore one story of how a lesbian consultant used her marginal identity to relate, and ultimately build confidence in, an African-American student whose essay was about experiencing prejudice. Likewise, in her chapter "'The Quality of Light': Using Narrative in a Peer Tutoring Class," Ann Green discusses how in efforts to deal with the issue of race less directly and as a more integral part of her tutor training course, she decided to have students read articles about the

intersectional nature of identities. In one article about identity, the authors' discussion of sexuality allowed for the students who presented the articles -- one who was a lesbian, one who was questioning, and two who were heterosexual -- to discuss how their sexualities intersected with their other identity categories.

Both Mandy Suhr-Systma & Shan-Estelle Brown (2011) and Neil Simpkins (2013) take up LGBTQ issues in relation to dealing with forms of oppression that can occur in the writing center between tutors and writers. Suhr-Systma and Brown (2011) discuss two heuristics that were designed with and by tutors in their writing center "to better identify and challenge the everyday, often subtle, language of oppression" that can occur with any identities such as race, class, gender, or sexuality (p.14). In one of their critical reflection activities, prompted by a heuristic, a bisexual tutor discussed how her roommate's unintentionally oppressive use of homophobic language caused her to feel uncomfortable and oppressed. Simpkins, a transgender graduate writing tutor, explores how microaggressions, which are "small acts of violence, often at the level of talk, discourse, or bodily interaction that can make a space feel unsafe for an individual," (Simpkins, 2013, para. 8) can affect both LGBTQ writers and tutors. He goes on to offer strategies and tips for writing center administrators and tutors to consider when trying make centers spaces that embrace LGBTQ persons.

While scholarship focused on racism and oppression have provided intersectional sites where writing center scholars may incorporate LGBTQ issues in the writing center, a discussion of identities and their potential to create both points of connection and contention between students is another theme in LGBTQ writing center literature. In "A Hybrid Discussion of Multiliteracy and Identity Politics" Timothy Ballingall (2013) argues that since writing centers are embracing multimodal forms of composing that they need to continue this expansion of

multiliteracy to include identity. In this model, sexuality becomes a literacy practice that tutors need to be knowledgeable of in order for them to meet the needs of the variety of students they will work with. Just as Ballingall (2013) talks about identity politics in relation to multiliteracy, Denny (2010) explores the historical nature of the identity politics of sex and gender and how they relate to writing centers in order to demonstrate how writing centers can engage sometimes difficult but necessary conversations. Likewise, Maggie Herb & Virginia Perdue (2011) have discussed their consultants' reaction to Safe Zone presenters, who came to educate the tutors about LGBTQ issues as part of a regular training session. They suggest that for meaningful change to occur, conversations around LGBTQ issues can not happen just once, but have to be a part of an ongoing conversation.

The space in which LGBTQ writing center scholarship has seen the most traction is along the lines of reflective writing. In a set of useful companion articles, Jay Sloan (1997) initially reflects on a particular session around a piece of student writing he thought was homophobic, and his discomfort with the issue led him to avoid confronting the student directly. When he rethinks this same session several years later, Sloan concludes “that the evasion of conflict and confrontation may actually and fundamentally disempower student writers” (Sloan & Rihn, 2013, p. 13). Cathy Darrup (1994) similarly reflects on a session involving homophobic, racist, and anti-feminist writing and how she responded to the male writer. Rihn (2014) considers both the ethics and transformative potential of asking tutors to work with writing that makes them uncomfortable, specifically homophobic writing, while Curtis Dickerson & Jonathan Rylander (2012) have considered the working conditions and ethics of asking LGBTQ tutors to have politically polarizing conversations around issues of homosexuality, with each author taking a different stance. While all of these reflective articles have focused primarily on tutor issues, Tara



Pauliny (2012) has explored the queer experiences of being both an assistant professor and a Writing Program Administrator, and how this liminal position has helped her challenge institutional binaries around expert/novice and faculty/administrator (Pauliny 2012; Sloan & Rihn, 2013).

While current research at the intersections of LGBTQ studies and writing centers has provided writing center personnel with important frames for thinking about our spaces, our interactions, and our responses to student texts, none of the research has thus far engaged writing consultants through a broader lens in order to understand the complex performances of identity that they see themselves engaging in throughout their time in writing centers. As a gay-identified writing center consultant, beyond methods for responding to a particularly homophobic essay or understanding the writing center space in theoretical terms, I believe I, and others like me, would benefit from more sustained attention to the narrative and reflective experiences of a broad range of LGBTQ writing consultants. For me, however, any discussion of LGBTQ identity is incomplete without considering how both consultants, writers, and other staff members feel or are made to feel about those identities. With the intimate connections that exist between LGBTQ identity and emotions, affects, and feelings in mind, I want to now take a look at the literature that has been published about affect, which as I will explain is a large umbrella that encompasses emotions and feelings.

## **Affect Literature**

### **What is Affect Theory?**

Throughout history and modern day many fields of study have been interested in the subject of emotions. Some of these fields include, but are not limited to: psychology, neuroscience, cultural studies, cultural history, cultural politics, conversation analysis, discursive psychology, linguistic

anthropology, sociology, and social psychoanalysis (Wetherell, 2012). As scholars and thinkers in a host of disciplines, which value and understand the biological and social aspects of human beings in very different ways, began to study emotions, the discourse used to discuss emotions proliferated. One such word that resulted from this expanded emotional vocabulary is the word affect, which was first described by psychologist Silvan Tomkins in his book *Affect Imagery Consciousness* (1962). He writes that affect is “the innate, biological response to the increasing, decreasing or persistent intensity of neural firing. This results in a particular feeling, facial and body display, and skin changes” (p. 34). Tomkins believes emotions occur when humans recognize, name, and relate these affects to previous experiences. Currently, though, the definitions and distinctions between affect and emotion has become blurred as scholars from the laboratory sciences (biology, neuroscience, etc.) to the humanities (philosophy, English, film studies, etc.) are using the terms in differing ways. While this is not a hard and fast rule, a majority of scholars working in hard sciences understand emotions and affect to be an innate, bodily response that happens mainly inside of the body in response to a particular environmental stimuli, while those working in social sciences and humanities recognize the biological nature of emotion and affect, they place more emphasis on the social and relational aspects of emotion and affect. That is, they are more interested in the external aspect than the internal. Because of the overlapping, conflicting, and at times utterly confusing ways affect and emotion are used, I want to spend the next section providing definitions and a brief distinction of the way that I will be using and distinguishing between affect and emotion.

Affect, according to a host of scholars in cultural studies and others who use critical theory, all of which are the main fields of thought I will be drawing from throughout this thesis, encompasses the messiness and range of human visceral feelings and bodily responses that are a

part of both conscious and unconscious daily lived experience. One small part of the larger affective umbrella is emotion, which involves the “conscious awareness of bodily affects” (Watkins, 2006, p. 274). Emotion, then, at least as it is understood in cultural studies and by critical theorists, is the naming of particular affects that your body registers. For this thesis, I have decided to take affect as my main category of analysis because it is a broader, more inclusive category that is not limited by the language we have to describe emotion. While it is important to name what you feel--as in “I feel scared”--I wonder what parts of bodily sensations are missed, left out, overlooked, and melded together when we label a particular experience fearful. Were you scared, but at the same time ecstatic? To what level and what degree did you feel fear? Did you actually feel fear, or was that the emotion you were expected to feel within that particular context, which thus made you push other feelings to the fringes of your cognition? I believe that affect begins to probe at and capture the true messy and fluid way in which humans experience the world in a way that is not probable with static emotional categories. Still though, I will intentionally slip between emotion and affect, and at times emotion/affect to show just how interconnected they are and to represent the difficulty that fields have had in parsing the differences between the two. I have decided to consciously blur these definitions in the vein of Sara Ahmed, who is influential in many fields but particularly in cultural studies, queer theory, feminist theory, and critical race theory. In the *Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) Ahmed spends a small portion of time distinguishing between affect and emotion both in footnotes and in-text. She ultimately slips between them to show their connections as well as to refuse the need to categorize and label these words. This refusal of categorization and labels, at least to some degree, pays homage to queer theory and the value its practitioners place upon embracing the fluid nature of human experience--a fluidity that can not be honored by strict adherence to labels.

Thus, just as Ahmed (2004) does, I plan on honoring the messiness and non-categorical nature of queer theory, but more importantly, instead of spending my time defining and labeling emotion/affect, I plan on using this thesis to understand and tease out the impact that affective happenings have on consultants and writers. In short, just as Ahmed (2004) models in her book, I am concerned less about stabilizing and restraining definitions at this point and more about analyzing and understanding the consequences of emotion/affect.

With that said, though, I do want to briefly unpack affect a bit more as to enhance clarity and to provide a bit of a foundation from which to read the rest of this thesis. To do so, I want to turn to the work of communication scholar Eric Shouse (2005) which carefully parses the difference between emotion, affect, and feeling. In this article Shouse draws heavily upon the work of a leading affect and emotion theorist, Brian Massumi, whose work ranges disciplines but is mainly considered a part of the field of philosophy and who works from a cultural theory lens. In his easy to read and often cited article, Shouse, writes that:

“An affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential. Of the three central terms in this essay – feeling, emotion, and affect – affect is the most abstract because affect cannot be fully realised in language, and because affect is always prior to and/or outside of consciousness” (Shouse, 2005, para. 5).

Shouse (2005)’s definition of affect is useful for me particularly because of his focus on intensity and the way that affect can not be “fully” understood through language, I disagree with the notion that affect is always non-conscious (see Wetherell, 2012). For example, throughout Wetherell (2012), but specifically on pages 123-6, she argues that the notion that affect is always non-conscious separates what is very bodily felt and experienced to something that is subjectless.

This understanding of affect, she argues, too quickly becomes something that is essentialist and thus begins to forget the “histories of social psychology and feminist research across the social sciences” (p. 126) that have sought to change this understanding. I, like Wetherell (2012), believe that beginning to see affect as a force without a body begins to deny the very important lived experiences of people, but especially those of oppressed and marginalized backgrounds that have used bodily lived and felt experiences as sites of political action and resistance. Putting Shouse’s notion of non-consciousness, and its possible implications aside, his focus on intensity, and its insistence on the materiality of something pressing against you or affecting you is useful in thinking about affect. Defining something as “intense” or having an “intensity” highlights an important aspect of how I understand affect. Intensity connotes or implies the common phrase “degrees of intensity” which then represents something that always moves, changes, or varies based on particular contextual and societal factors. This fluidity then begins to capture the way that affect is always experienced and felt differently depending on who is experiencing it. The story I told at the beginning of this chapter about how I felt while reading the homophobic paper, would have gone differently if it would have happened to a person with varied experiences. Even still, another gay person may have felt differently about it than I did. This, to me, sharply contrasts with the static labels and categories that are emotions. Affect, as Shouse (2005) writes is “unstructured and unformed potential” which is radically different from the particular names we retroactively place upon these moments, which of course are emotions. Thus, affect is something that is always in flux, dependent upon context, and bodily felt. In the next section, I want to provide a quick overview of emotion and affect in both writing center studies and rhetoric and composition. Because the chapters on shame and attraction will each offer a more focused, topical literature review, this next section will be intentionally brief. I am less interested

in carefully tracing out the history of emotion and affect in each field, as this work has been done by others (rhetoric and composition: Micchice, 2007 & writing centers: Rowell, 2015), but more interested in using queer and affect theory as a way of highlighting the ways affect and emotion have been discussed throughout the history of rhetoric and composition as well as the closely related field of writing center studies, which as I will demonstrate consistently thinks about emotions in problematic binary ways.

### **Emotion/Affect in Rhetoric and Composition**

Scholars working in the field of rhetoric and composition have long been interested in emotion, and many usually begin this discussion with Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in which he discusses, among other things, his three artistic proofs, or *pisteis*, that rhetors can use to persuade their audiences. The three proofs that he discusses are *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. Of the three, *pathos*, is the one that primarily deals with emotion. For Aristotle emotion is defined as "all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgements, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure" (1378a). *Pathos*, then, is being aware of an audience's emotional inclinations and then using appeals to specific emotions to persuade the audience of a certain viewpoint or action.

While many scholars have worked to expand and reimagine the ways in which Aristotle actually understood emotion and its significance to any act of communication (Leighton, 1996; Cooper, 1996; Frede, 1996; Striker, 1996; Nussbaum, 1996; Quandahl, 2003; Micchiche, 2007) the modern, Western view of Aristotle's notion of emotion has been reduced to the argumentative appeal--*pathos*. The same school of thought that collapsed *pathos* and emotion into the same category--20/21st century, Western educational organizations and institutions--has at the same time privileged rational, objective, and factual arguments and writing. This understanding of critical thinking as a dispassionate, objective process has helped downplay the

importance of *pathos*, while at the same time causing Aristotle's two other *pisteis*, *ethos* and *logos*, to seem even more important and prominent. The fact that *pathos* has been relegated to a lesser status than other rhetorical concepts can be seen in Moon (2003)'s article that explores the ways in which *pathos* has been written about in composition textbooks published after 1998. The 25 textbooks only talk about emotions in the terms of the argumentative appeal, which for many authors (Leighton, 1996; Cooper, 1996; Frede, 1996; Striker, 1996; Nussbaum, 1996; Quandahl, 2003; Micciche, 2007) is a limited understanding or reading of Aristotle's work on emotions. Moon (2003) attributes this lack of serious attention to *pathos* to the fact that "contemporary rhetoric does not have a unified rhetoric of the emotions..." (p. 39), and that binary logic organizes Western thought. This binary logic is gendered, and thus pits rational, masculine thought against emotional, feminine thought. This same view of emotions, as I will explore in the next section, has also impacted the way the field of writing center studies understands affect/emotion. Scholars working in the field of rhetoric and composition throughout the last 30 years, a majority of which are women, have worked to rethink and theorize how emotion impacts our work.

Alice Brand's main argument throughout a majority of her work (1980, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1991, 1994) which never clearly distinguishes between emotion and affect, critiqued the overtly cognitivist and mechanistic way the field of rhetoric and composition approached and understood the minds of student writers. In this work, Brand has published extensively on the need for the field of composition to recognize and research the importance of emotions in the writing process. Building upon Brand, Susan McLeod (1987, 1997) takes it upon herself to distinguish between emotion and affect, but then to use the discourse she introduced to ethnographically research how anxiety, motivation, belief, and attitude affected student writers.

In the next wave of emotion and affect research in rhetoric and composition Lynn Worsham (1998) and Kathleen Dixon (1998) give very little thought to the difference between the words, but instead work to theorize and understand the ways that identities and societal and political influences impact emotion and affect. Interestingly enough both of these authors, who are publishing in the same year use words with explosive, violent, and disruptive connotations to theorize emotional moments. Worsham's is a pop-culture term "going postal" that has its historic roots in U.S. Post Office employees high frequency of violent and deadly acts against fellow employees "as a way of settling workplace grievances perceived to be beyond resolution or appeal" (Worsham, p. 1). Dixon (1998) defines outbursts as

"a moment when the often latent conflicts among faculty and among students, between students and faculty, or within individuals bubble to the surface, erupting in class discussions...An outburst is a response to a conflict that expresses a person's orientation to that conflict and to the social and political conditions that underlie it." (p. xi).

Within the next ten years, we see scholars make arguments as to why emotions are indeed rhetorical. Micciche & Jacobs (2003) and Micciche (2007) work to reconnect emotions back to *pathos* and rhetoric by emphasizing regardless of interdisciplinary understanding, emotions cause both the mind and body of people to move or not move, and is thus rhetorical. Micciche (2007) also argues that emotions are rhetorical because they are constructed between people, and are not simply within or inside individuals. With both of these rhetorical understandings of emotion/affect in mind, writing center sessions, which are full of emotional one-on-one interactions between consultant and writer, seem to be sites ripe for emotional analysis. Interestingly enough, though, there is only a small body of literature that explores the role of



emotion/affect in writing center tutorials, and, as I will discuss in the next section, a majority of this research is problematically binary in its understanding of the role of emotions.

### **Emotion/Affect in Writing Center Studies**

In the literature review chapter of Rowell (2015)'s thesis, *Let's Talk Emotions: Re-envisioning the Writing Center through Consultant Emotional Labor*, she expertly summarizes both the ways in which emotions operate in the center and the emotions that have been discussed in the research when she writes that:

“In their book *A Synthesis of Qualitative Studies of Writing Center Tutoring*, Babock, Manning, Rogers, Goff, and McCain (2012) note the different types of emotions commonly viewed in writing center sessions. Babock et al. state that ‘Emotions play an important part in the tutoring session. Tutors and tutees can relate through emotions’ (p. 73). Sharing emotions within a session can lead to a more collaborative session through the fostering of a sense of community and belonging. Within writing center sessions, studies have found that consultants experience frustration (Callaway, 1993; Wolcott, 1989; Stachera, 2003; Lerner, 1996), fear (McInerney, 1998; Robertson, 2005), comfort (Bean, 1998; Hunter, 1993; Stachera, 2003; Melnick, 1984), guilt (Blau, Hall, & Sparks, 2002; Callaway, 1993; Haas, 1986; Nicklay, 2012), and anxiety (Mattison, 2007).” (p. 25).

A detailed exploration of each of these articles is outside the scope and purpose of this introductory section, as many of these articles will be explored in more depth throughout each chapter and because this work has been done elsewhere (Rowell, 2015). In this section, though, I do want to demonstrate how writing centers constantly think of emotion/affect in very limited and binary terms. That is, the field thinks that all “positive” affects are “good” and more valuable

to helping the writer achieve their goals within the session, while negative emotions/affects are inherently “bad,” and distracting from the goals of the session. When could a “negative” emotion be useful in a session you may ask? Geller, Condon, Carroll (2011) answer this question in their article which explores how reflecting on shameful moments when it comes to issues of racism in the writing center, in fact, helps consultants learn how to be more accepting and how to consultant in more ethical ways. Since I will explore this article and the affective experience of shame in later chapters, for now I want to explore in a bit more detail one book chapter that seeks to intervene in the way positive emotions are thought about in the center.

In Chapter 3 of her book *Peripheral Visions* (2013) Grutsch McKinney interrogates the commonplace assumption that writing centers should be comfortable homes. While many people would argue the “positive” affective/emotional feeling of comfort is a good thing, Grutsch McKinney notes in her analysis that common writing center objects (coffee pots, art, plants, chairs, and couches) and notions of home and comfort are based on certain cultural and class-based assumptions, specifically those of white, American, middle-class people. Because of her nation-wide survey research of writing center directors, in which she asked them about writing center design, we can conclude that a good percentage of writing centers operating within the US, then, are designed in a way that benefits dominant societal groups, and thus marginalizes people who do not fit into this narrow group of white, American, middle-class people. What does it mean to ask a student who doesn’t share these common understandings of home or comfort to work in a space that defines them as the outsider? How do the physical spaces of centers dictate who is normal and who is not? And more importantly, how does this particular affective environment impact the ability of students to learn?

In her disruption of this seemingly innocent and highly normalized notion that writing centers should be designed in the vein of what white, American, middle-class people find as cozy, comfortable homes, Grutsch McKinney opens up not only a new way of understanding and critiquing the space and design of writing centers, but also a new way of thinking about “positive” emotions. That is, through rigorous research and analysis she demonstrates how comfort--and I would argue that by extension other “positive” emotions/affects--are at times dangerous and marginalizing to certain groups of people (those who are not white, American, middle-class people, in this case) within the writing center community. Her project, then, meshes well with tenets of queer theory which seek to intervene in normalized, common sense discourses that are based on binary logic, such as white, American, middle-class notions of comfort and cozy are “good,” while other understandings of home become understood as “negative” or “bad.” Writing center directors and tutors more often than not try to create home-like spaces because they genuinely believe that this will make students comfortable, but when certain unexamined values and identities dictate the definition of comfortability then those who do not share that definition are placed at a disadvantage. Positioning writers and consultants who are not white, American, and middle-class at a disadvantage, as this understanding of comfort does, is just one example of the dangers of binary emotional/affective logic that this thesis seeks to intervene in. To be clear, by binary emotional/affective logic, I am talking about the assumption that emotions that are usually thought of as positive always produce positive or beneficial results for the consultant or writer. This also, of course, applies to assuming stereotypical negative emotions are always harmful to the overall goals of the session. Just as Grutsch McKinney intervenes in the common logic of comfort by showing how it can be oppressive, in this thesis I will intervene in the two emotions/affects of shame and attraction

particularly as they are experienced by gay male consultants. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate how both of these affective states, which many would consider negative or inappropriate and which are thus rarely thought about at all in the field of writing center studies, should be paid attention to because of what they can show us about our work that otherwise might not be seen.

### **Chapters at a Glance**

#### **Chapter 2: Methods**

In this chapter, I will explore the methods, methodology, and coding scheme that I used to make sense of the interviews I conducted. I will also provide a more detailed explanation of the research questions and objectives that this thesis will seek to answer. Along with that, I will introduce all 7 of the participants that I interviewed for this study, and then provided the rationale as to why I decided to focus mainly on two of them. I will end this section by discussing the limitations of my study.

#### **Chapter 3: Shame**

In this chapter, I will explore how shameful feelings in the writing center impacted both consultants. Specifically, I will argue that these shameful feelings were caused by heteronormative gender expectations of their center, and that these feelings directly impacted the way they expressed their gender and sexual identity, and thus affected the way they worked with writers. I will also argue that the seemingly negative emotion of shame can be used as a motivator or catalyst for action, and as a heuristic tool to explore ethical concerns of working one-on-one with writers.

#### **Chapter 4: Attraction**

In this chapter, I will discuss the taboo and rarely talked about implications of what experiencing same-sex attraction in the writing center means for gay male consultants and the

writers they work with. I will discuss how the feelings of attraction that both consultants experienced directly impacted the way they worked with writers. This analysis will be framed by sources that explore the importance of desire, love, and attraction specifically as it relates to issues of pedagogy and teaching.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this chapter, I will synthesize and bring together the two individual cases that I have presented throughout my thesis in an attempt to make larger claims about the usefulness of understanding affect and queer theory in the writing center. Also, I will look to the future to suggest what a queer and affective approach to writing center work could mean for the field more broadly. I will also suggest possibilities for future research.

### **Conclusion**

This thesis continues to look at and analyze the work of writing centers through the lens of queer and affect theory, and in so doing highlights new ways to understand and participate in this work. As theoretical frames for this project, then, queer and affect theory work together because they both find value in resisting categorization. For example, because emotions/affects are fleeting and temporal, they become difficult to analyze and make sense of. Queer theory, which embraces fluidity and embodied ways of experiencing the world, then becomes a vital analytical framework from which to begin unravelling and thinking about the impacts that emotions/affects have in writing center tutorials. Queer theory and affect theory, then, are useful for understanding the emotions of any person, but are even more so when it comes to analyzing the experiences of LGBTQ consultants whose very identities, genders, and sexual orientations do not mesh with dominant societal perceptions of the world. These theories, together then will allow us to look at writing center work in alternate ways, in ways that are in-between and beside

the normal practices of writing center work. By shining light on the marginal, less-known aspects of writing center work, as for example the negative emotion of shame or experiences of same-sex attraction in the writing center, I believe these frames will help me point to aspects of writing center work that are on the periphery, but nonetheless valuable. Not only will these theories help highlight and make sense of the specific experiences of the gay male consultants I interviewed, but by applying these theories and writing about them at length, I will demonstrate a method of thinking about writing center consultants, tutorial interactions with writers, and the complexities of identities and emotions/affects in the writing center that could be applied by other writing center researchers. Thus, not only do I hope to analyze moments of shame and attraction as it applies to gay male consultants, I also hope to clearly articulate an alternate way of thinking about the work of writing center consultants that can have more broad applications. Queer and affect theory, then, I believe are useful analytical frameworks for writing centers because they both emphasize the messiness of human interaction, identity, affect/emotion, and ever-changing circumstances, which are all components of the work that writing centers do every day. And, it is the small, everyday interactions between consultants and writers that I, and the field of writing center studies, want to better understand.

## **Chapter 2: Methods**

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I introduced queer and affect theory, which will serve as the analytical frameworks that will guide and connect each chapter of this thesis. Along with providing introductions and definitions for both queer and affect theory, I also discussed the ways in which both of these theories and subjects have been discussed in the scholarly literature published in the fields of writing center studies and rhetoric and composition. In particular, I called attention to the lack of research that explores issues of emotion/affect and LGBTQ studies/queer theory within writing center studies and rhetoric and composition. I also illustrated that when these subjects have been taken up, they have been discussed in limited and problematically binary ways that can lead to oppressive conditions for both consultants and writers. In this chapter, I will explain the methods and methodological approaches taken to analyze and understand the interviews I conducted with 7 LGBTQ consultants. I will present the coding scheme and process that I undertook to make sense of the experiences and stories that the LGBTQ consultants shared with me. By doing so, I hope to highlight the intertwined ways that emotions and identity function in the writing center, and how these complexities affect the work of tutoring writing. Along with providing the research questions and objectives of this thesis study, I will also introduce the participants that I interviewed, and the limitations of my research study.

### **Research Questions and Objectives**

As I mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, I originally conducted the interviews that will be presented in this thesis for a research project about LGBTQ consultants and their experiences around issues of gender and sexual identity within the writing center. Thus, the

interview questions I asked solely pertained to how these aspects of identity (gender/sexuality) impacted the LGBTQ consultants' work with writers and other staff members in the writing center (see interview questions below). For this thesis though, I am reanalyzing the results of these interviews through the lens of both gender and sexuality (queer theory) as well as emotions and affect (affect theory). I decided to reinterpret the results with the added attention to emotion/affect because during my original exploration of the data, as the coding categories I discuss later demonstrate, many of the experiences that the consultants told me in relation to their gender and sexual identity were highly emotional. Thus, when trying to make sense of these moments the queer theoretical lens was incomplete in that it did not provide a basis from which to begin to understand the highly emotional components of their stories. Queer and affect theory together, though, provide a richer picture and more thorough analytical framework for understanding how the intertwined complexities of identity and emotion/affect impacted the interactions between the LGBTQ consultants and writers I interviewed. As I will demonstrate in chapters 3 and 4, and in more thorough detail in chapter 5, these theories not only apply to LGBTQ consultants but also have more broad applications when seeking to understand the role of identity and emotion/affect in any writing center session.

As previously mentioned, this thesis is driven by the following research questions: 1) How does experiencing shame or attraction in the context of a writing center session impact, if at all, the writing center session? 2) How can a queer theoretical reading of emotion/affect influence writing center work? Through seeking to answer these questions, this thesis works to achieve the following objectives:



- To provide a close analysis of the ways in which the gender/sexual identities and emotion/affects of a small sample size of gay male consultants impact their ability to work one-on-one with writers.
- To evaluate the way that the emotion of shame and attraction operate within writing center sessions.
- To provide a method for researching and reflecting on how the complexities between identity and emotion/affect impact writing center sessions.
- To challenge the limited ways the field of writing center studies has engaged with LGBTQ studies/queer theory and affect theory.

Both the research questions and the objectives of this thesis are important to keep in mind as they helped provide the rationale for the overall design of this study. The research questions and the objectives will also figure prominently when seeking to making sense of the interview data.

### **Epistemology and Methodology**

As I discussed in chapter 1, queer and affect theory are theoretical frames that value temporality, the messiness of felt and embodied human experience, fluidity of emotions, and detest or defy categorization. My choice, then, of these theoretical frameworks to discuss identity and emotion/affect are signs of my epistemological and methodological approach to the subject of emotions and identity. Instead of approaching emotions from a biological or psychological perspective I approach emotions/affect from a cultural studies and critical theory perspective. That is, I believe emotions/affects are not simply results of nerve endings and chemical reactions, but that they are produced through interactions between human beings in particular societal conditions. Emotions/affects can never be simply understood because they are always changing

in response to different interactions between people, interactions in which identities are formed, changed, and moved. Thus, the concept of objectivity is foreign to me, instead I believe in subjectivity--that everything is dependent on contextual and societal influences. I approach this research project with my own personal experiences as a gay writing center consultant firmly in my mind. The importance of these experiences are the reasons that I began Chapter 1 describing two of them. My desire to explore issues of gay male identity and emotion/affect stem from my own embodied experiences. This view or theory of research as something that is personal and subjective and not something that is detached and objective aligns with Pamela Takayoshi, Elizabeth Tomlinson, and Jennifer Castillo's claim that "...research questions do not begin from simply 'noticing a gap' in existing scholarship. It is a complex process of bringing the individual (and all of his or her intellectual, epistemological, ideological, political, and nonacademic commitments and experiences) into conversation with the existing body of scholarship" (Takayoshi, Tomlinson, & Castillo, 2012, p. 108). This quote exemplifies my own approach to this research project, and the ways that my own embodied history and experiences have helped spur my interest in exploring and understanding gay male identities and emotions in the writing center. I also believe that knowledge is socially constructed between people and their individual experiences (Smagorinsky, 2008; Bazerman, 2008). Because I believe knowledge is constructed socially, through interactions with others, I place high value on the voice of my participants. While throughout this thesis I will seek to analyze and make sense of the interviews I conducted, I will also provide multiple stand-alone quotes that seek to honor the individual voices of my participants. By attending to their voices and truly seeking to learn from each other, I seek to ground my research in feminist, reciprocal, and ethical methodologies that other researchers have used. Two such researchers, Pamela Takayoshi and Katrina Powell, explain this approach when

they write: “[The] nonhierarchical, reciprocal relationship, in which both researcher and researched learn from one another and have a choice in the study, is informed by a feminist desire for eliminating power inequalities between researchers and participants and a concern for the difficulties of speaking for ‘the other’” (2003, p. 395). Again, to value these principles and beliefs, I plan on relying quotes from my participants, and through my analysis I will attempt to provide knowledge back to the writing center community about gay male identities, and emotion/affect in an attempt to share the knowledge that my participants and I constructed together.

### **Methods**

For this study, I chose to use qualitative research methods because I was interested in collecting, understanding, analyzing, and reinterpreting the stories and experiences of gay male writing center consultants specifically around the impact their emotions and gender/sexual identities may or may not have on the dynamics of writing center sessions. I specifically chose to use interviews and case studies because they allowed me the opportunity to focus on the stories and experiences of a small sample size with a greater attention to detail. Through an analysis of the stories and experiences of individual people, I am able to paint a more detailed picture of the complex ways that gender/sexuality and affect inform the daily work of gay male writing center consultants.

This research study went through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, and was approved in October 2014 by the IRB review board at East Carolina University (ECU). Before both in-person and video interviews began, I provided each participant with an informed consent document that stated the goals of the research study, and more importantly that their participation in the research was completely voluntary. Not only did the interviewees read through this

document, I also talked them through it and answered any questions they had. The interviewees names and identifying information were removed from the notes and recordings of the interview data. When I refer to the participants I interviewed for this project, I will refer to them by pseudonyms that I have chosen for them. Each interview was semi-structured around a set of interview questions, but I allowed each participant the chance to lead and direct the conversation as they wished in order to honor their experiences and individual voices. Because of this individualized and conversational style of conducting the interviews, the amount of time spent talking with participants ranged from 20 minutes to over an hour.

The interview questions I asked of each participant are as follows:

- What is the role of a writing center consultant as you understand it?
- What role do you think a writer plays in a center or session?
- How do or don't you construct your gender or sexual identity in the center?
- Can you describe a situation in which you feel like you intentionally constructed or chose not to perform a certain aspect of your gender or sexual identity in the writing center?
- What role do you think attraction plays in the writing center?
- What role does (or should) gender/sexual identity play in the writing center?

## **Interviews**

Participants were recruited from the LGBTQ Special Interest Group (SIG) at the 2014 NCTPW/IWCA conference, after asking and receiving permission to do so from both the conference directors and the SIG leaders. While I gave a brief overview of my research ideas in-person at the LGBTQ SIG, I also posted a recruitment message to the conference's Facebook page. Of the seven interviews I conducted, five were in-person at the conference headquarters

and two were virtual after the conference through Google Hangout. The on-site interviews happened in a quiet corner of the large conference hotel, with the participants and myself either seated on the same couch or couches across from each other. Before I began the interview and started my audio recorder, I collected demographic information such as age, race, and gender identity, along with institutional affiliation and number of semesters spent working in a writing center. To be eligible for this study, participants had to be at least 18 years-old and be currently working in a writing center. As I mentioned the previous section, each interview varied in length from 20 minutes to over an hour. Also, each interview was semi-structured around a particular set of interview questions (see above), but was also dictated by the natural flow of conversation and in response to the individual stories and experiences the consultants were detailing.

After conducting all of the interviews (five in persona and two online), I noticed two broad categories of interviewee experiences: those who feel that their sexuality/gender impacts their writing center sessions and those who feel that their sexuality/gender doesn't impact sessions. I initially noticed these two categories during my interviews with each of my seven participants, as there was a clear divide in those who really saw their gender/sexual identity playing a significant role in their role as a consultant, and those who did not. My initial thoughts were only confirmed as I went through the coding process I will explore below.

## **Coding**

After transcribing the interviews and doing an initial read through, I began to code inductively by assigning tentative codes for different passages of text. I chose to use inductive, emergent coding because I wanted to allow the participant's experiences and voices to guide my analysis and meaning-making process. During that process, I began to notice that some codes were occurring more frequently than others and some, while I labeled them with different

terminology, meant essentially the same thing. For example, two of my initial codes were *downplay* and *passive*, but after multiple readings, I noticed that all instances with these codes were times in which the consultant did not insert their identity. Therefore, on a second read through of the transcript, I created seven more comprehensive codes: express identity, withhold identity, uncomfortable, comfortable, performance, attraction and homophobic (See Table 1 below).

*Table 1: Definition of Codes*

<b>Code name</b>	<b>Definition of Code</b>	<b>Example of Code</b>
Express Identity	The consultant talks about a time where they expressed or talked about their identity in a session or in the writing center.	“Umm because with my female clients immediately I can open up... hey so girl you did that on this paper.”
Withhold Identity	The consultant talks about a time where they withheld or did not reveal aspects of their identity in a session or in the writing center	“...even if they are writing about queer experiences I don’t necessarily feel obligated to bring up that I share that experience.”
Comfortable (positive, comfortable)	The consultant talks about either themselves or the writer experiencing a positive feeling.	“We’re there to definitely try to make it a little bit more comfortable.”
Uncomfortable (intimidated, nervous)	The consultants talks about either themselves or the writer experiencing a negative feeling.	“They are intimidated for sure.”
Performance	The consultant talks about how they moved their body, how they spoke, and/or what they said conveyed their gender or sexuality.	“There were times, like I can right now cross my legs, or speak to everyones like ‘hey girl’”
Attraction	The consultant talks about the writer being physically pleasing to look at or moments of flirtation.	“We were sitting at the table and his knee kept brushing up against mine.”

Homophobic	The consultant talks about a time when someone in the center, writer or staff member, was negative or discriminatory of someone in the LGBTQ community.	“It essentially boiled down to he thinks we are all sluts and promiscuous.”
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A majority of these comprehensive codes, though, did not focus on the complex role that emotions/affect played in the stories that the consultants told me. The obvious exception to this is the codes of uncomfortable, comfortable, and attraction, all of which are emotions/affective states. Even though these particular codes (uncomfortable, comfortable, attraction) are emotional by definition, it was not until later in my analysis/meaning-making part of the research process that I began to notice how all the experiences that the consultants told me about were related to or prompted by emotion/affect. That is, later in the analysis process, I began to notice the complex ways that all the stories they told me around issues of identity were either highly emotional, or at the least had an affective component or undercurrent. In the next section (analysis), I will address this interplay between emotion/affect and identity in further detail. For now, though, it is important to point out that the seven comprehensive codes (express identity, withhold identity, uncomfortable, comfortable, performance, attraction and homophobic) were representative of smaller tentative codes. In the case of the previous example, the passages marked *downplay* and *passive* became withhold identity. This process of coding and understanding the stories was, of course, recursive: at times I would read a passage once and assign it a code only to reread it a couple of times and then assign it another code. This iterative process allowed me to recognize larger codes more quickly. Because of the different ways that each participant talked about their experiences, my unit of analysis ranged from individual words (comfort, uncomf) to longer passages of text (withhold identity, express identity). While every

code helped inform my analysis, and I organized the results section around three main categories that were particularly useful to my research questions: these involved moments in the interviews where identity was *expressed*, where identity was *withheld* (Chapter 3), and where issues of *attraction* were recognized/evident (Chapter 4).

## **Analysis**

After transcribing and coding the interviews, I began to notice that almost every experience that the consultant remembered as related to their gender and sexual identity had something to do with affect. In some experiences, it was highly emotional writing that caused to them to react in a particular way that either made their gay male identity more visible (express identity) or which caused them to attempt to conceal that identity (withhold identity). Still other times, it was either particular encounters with writers, staff members, or other people in the writing center space that caused them to focus on or recognize more fully their own identity as LGBTQ. Thus, one way of understanding the relationship between the consultants' LGBTQ identity and emotion/affect is the notion of a trigger. To be clear, my understanding of trigger has nothing to do with the concept of trigger warning that has become popular in some social science research. By this, I mean that particular affective and emotional experiences that would trigger (cause) the consultants to recognize their particular gender and sexual identity in the context of the writing center. Depending on the context in which they recognized their identity and the particular affective state in which this recognition happened, they would then decide to either further express or withhold their LGBTQ identity.

In order to explain this process and how I began to understand the consultants' experiences with emotion/affect and identity, I have problematically set up a linear, systematic, and binary way of thinking about the complicated, fluid, and volatile process that makes up the



relationship between affect and identity. As I discussed in Chapter 1, I chose to use affect because it is “...an experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential...” (Shouse, 2005, para. 5). This messiness--which I believe is an apt representation of human feelings and experience--is hard to categorize and name particularly because it is outside of the realm of tangibility and instead is based on human perception which happens quickly and is based on any number of factors which may or may not be explicitly known to people. Therefore, while I believe the idea of a “trigger” is useful in thinking about and making tangible the complex, unseen interactions between affect and identity, it is not nearly as simple as the cause-and-effect nature the word “trigger” seems to imply. So, although I will use the notion of a trigger to discuss and make-meaning out of interactions between gender/sexual identity and emotion/affect, it is important to remember that both of these categories are highly complex, fluid, dynamic, and situationally dependent variables on their own, and together become even more chaotic and hard to pin down. Also, it is important to keep in mind that while I am focusing on particular affects and their relationship to LGBTQ identity, there are a host of other obvious factors (race, age, class, dis/ability, etc.) and less obvious factors that impacted the ways in which the consultants I will discuss experienced particular moments.

### **Participant Histories**

For the purposes of this thesis, I have selected one interviewee from the broader categories of express identity (Harper) and withhold identity (Josiah) in order to explore those interviews in detail and to suggest theoretical categories that may prove useful to other researchers who are interested in beginning similar interview projects with LGBTQ-identified participants. Likewise, because these two interviewees work in the same writing center, while they can make no claims to universality, they offer two compelling ways of seeing the same

writing center space. While I will focus mainly on the voices and experiences of the two consultants, I will also use brief quotes and narratives from my five other participants in order to both compliment and at times complicate the stories told by the two main participants. Given the paucity of research in writing center scholarship that explores the voices and lived experience of LGBTQ consultants, particularly when it comes to their emotional experiences within the writing center, I believe this study offers future researchers options for thinking about both why studying LGBTQ consultants and the affective dimensions of their work is important and how we might go about asking meaningful questions. By telling their stories, I hope to highlight just some of the ways that members of the LGBTQ community, mainly gay males, have existed within a writing center. Before, I present their stories, though, I want to provide demographic information about each one.

**Harper:** Harper is a 25-year-old African-American male who self-identifies as gay. He is currently a senior undergraduate studying English and technical writing, and he has been working in the writing center since Jan. 2009. His writing center is a part of a public, southern research university of a small-medium size.

**Josiah:** Josiah is a 24-year-old white male who self-identifies as gay and is currently an undergraduate student studying philosophy and math. At the time of our interview, he had been working in the writing center for two semesters. His writing center is a part of a public, southern research university of a small-medium size.

**Brooke:** Brooke is a 23-year-old, white, female senior undergraduate who is majoring in professional and technical writing with a minor in sociology. She self-identifies as bisexual and at the time of our interview had been working at the writing center for one semester. Her writing center is a part of a public, southern research university of a small-medium size.

**Randy:** Randy is a 36-year-old, white, male first year Master’s student in professional and technical writing. He self identifies as gay, and at the time of our interview he had been working in the writing center for one semester. His writing center is a part of a public, southern research university of a small-medium size.

**Brandon:** Brandon is a 29-year-old, white, male, third-year Ph.D. student in rhetoric and composition. He self-identifies as gay, and at the time of our interview had worked in multiple writing centers for a total of seven semesters. At the time of our interview he also served as the assistant director of his center, which is a part of a medium-large public, midwestern research university.

**Anthony:** Anthony is a 24-year-old, white and hispanic, undergraduate communication studies major. He self-identifies as gay, and at the time of our interview had worked in the writing center for two semesters. His writing center is a part of a large, public, southern research university.

**Jayla:** Jayla is a 34-year-old, African-American, female, first-year Ph.D. student in rhetoric and composition. She self-identifies as a lesbian, and at the time of our interview had worked in multiple writing centers for a total of 3 semesters. Her writing center is a part of a large, public, midwestern research university.

*Table 2: Participant Demographic Information*

Participant	Age	Race	Gender	Sexuality
Harper	25	African-American	Male	Gay
Josiah	24	White	Male	Gay
Brooke	23	White	Female	Bisexual

Randy	36	White	Male	Gay
Anthony	24	White and Hispanic	Male	Gay
Jayla	34	African-American	Female	Lesbian

The first four participants I interviewed (Harper, Josiah, Brooke, and Randy) were from the same the same university, while the rest of the participants (Brandon, Anthony, and Jayla) were all from separate institutions. As I mentioned previously, for the purposes of this thesis I have decided to do an extensive case study on both Harper and Josiah, which will be supplemented by the voices of the five other consultants. I have decided to focus on Harper and Josiah for two reasons. First, they both have very different ideas and feelings about the ways that their identities as gay men function within the writing center. Josiah believes that his gender and sexual identity is not appropriate or necessary to express within the writing center, while Harper believes the only way he can effectively tutor writers is by expressing his gender and sexual identity. These vastly different perceptions of the roles their gender and sexual identities should occupy within the writing center also leads them to have very different emotions and feelings about their identities. This variety in their ideas about the role of gender/sexuality and emotion is made even more interesting by the fact that they work within the same writing center. The fact that they have many similarities, such as the fact that they work in the same writing center, received very similar training, are roughly the same age, and both self-identify as gay, but yet have very different ideas and feelings about their identities within the writing center, is second reason that I decided to focus only on them. Their strong similarities and extreme differences not only allow me to provide a comprehensive picture of the two major categories of consultants I

talked with (those who express their identity within the writing center, and those who withhold their identity), but it also points to diversity in the gay male community. That is, the identity category of “gay” is emotionally experienced and embodied in vastly different ways depending on a host of societal and contextual factors, and is not a universal label with universal characteristics. Because of both their similarities and differences then, Josiah and Harper provide an interesting and complex understanding of what it means to identify as a member of the gay male community and work within the writing center. In the next section, I will discuss the limitations of this research.

### **Limitations**

Although the number of limitations were mitigated through a careful research design and analysis process, limitations still exist within this study. In attempting to highlight the individual experiences and voices of LGBTQ consultants I had to limit the number of interviews I conducted. The small sample size of 7 consultants, then, reduces the depth and breadth of conclusions that can be drawn and decreases the probability that these results are representative of all LGBTQ consultants working in writing centers. Another limitation is the fact that 4 of the 7 participants interviewed worked within the same writing center and were students at the same university. This could suggest that their experiences were more about geographic location and/or the campus and writing center culture that they are a part of. Because I recruited participants from the 2014 International Writing Center Association, I obviously was limited to only the writing center consultants and professionals who attended this particular conference. More specifically, because I gave my recruitment pitch at the LGBTQ SIG I could only draw from the small number of participants that were there and/or the ones who shared details of my research project with other LGBTQ consultants they knew. One of the most grave limitations of my study

is the fact that the two participants who I decided to most closely analyze are both male, and both identify as gay. While they are of different ethnic backgrounds (Harper is African-American and Josiah is white), by focusing only on gay men I am not able to discuss in more detail the lived experiences of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer consultants. Although this research provides rich detail and thought about gay male writing center consultant experience, it does little to address a wide variety of LGBTQ people who are working in writing centers. As I will discuss in more detail in chapter 5, I believe future research studies should work to understand the similarities and differences between the experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer consultants.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented my research questions and objectives as well as the rationale for my research study. Also, I discussed the methods, methodologies, and epistemologies that helped shape both the way that I conducted and analyzed my interviews, as well as the beliefs and values that have helped shape the way I analyze and make-sense of the interview data. In the coding section of this chapter, I presented coding categories, definition of those coding categories, examples of the interview data that were assigned particular categories, and the emergent and inductive coding process that I underwent when analyzing the data. Lastly, I discussed the IRB process my research went through, introduced my participants, provided the rationale for why I was focusing on two particular consultants, and presented the limitations of my research study. Chapter 3 will explore how shameful feelings in the writing center impacted both consultants, and how this seemingly negative emotion can be used as a heuristic tool to learn about writing center work. Chapter 4 will discuss the taboo and rarely talked about implications of what experiencing same-sex attraction in the writing center means for gay male

consultants and the writers they work with. Lastly, Chapter 5 will bring together the two individual cases in an attempt to make larger claims about the usefulness of understanding affect and queer theory in the writing center.

## **Chapter 3: Shame**

### **Chapter Preview**

In previous chapters, I introduced and discussed literature about queer and affect theory (Chapter 1) and provided information about my research questions methods, methodology, rationale, and overall thesis objectives (Chapter 2). In this chapter I will begin to answer my research questions which, for clarity's sake, are: 1) How does experiencing shame or attraction in the context of a writing center session impact, if at all, the writing center session? 2) How can a queer theoretical reading of emotion/affect influence writing center work?

This chapter will focus specifically on the emotion/affect of shame and the role that it has played in the experiences of Harper and Josiah. In efforts to understand how their experiences of shame around gender and sexual identity in the context of the writing center relate to the other participants I interviewed, I will also briefly include quotes from two other participants: Brandon and Brooke. My goal for this chapter is to not only present the interviews I did, but also to provide a way of thinking about shame, and how it triggers moments where identity is brought to the forefront of sessions, that could be utilized by other writing center professionals whether through further research or professional development. Specifically, I will argue that shame is deeply connected to agency and as such causes consultants to act. These actions in response to shame, as I will show by discussing my participants' experiences, has direct impacts on the ways in which they work with writers. As such, shame becomes something we should pay attention to and understand more.



## Introduction

One-on-one conferences between student writers and writing center consultants are sites fraught with nerves and anxiety, as two people who more than likely have never met before, negotiate a new interpersonal communication landscape. Often, writing center professional development is spent teaching consultants strategies to establish rapport or “break the ice” with writers. This notion is based on the premise that writing center sessions are more effective when the writer and consultant establish a connection with each other, usually by finding some common ground (Rafoth, 2005; Gillespie & Lerner, 2010; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2016). When a connection between consultant and writer is established, the session can progress with a bit more ease and with less anxiety, but when this attempt at connection fails, for whatever reason, another affect/emotion can occur: shame.

In the field of writing center studies, there is a paucity of scholarship that analyzes shame (Geller, Condon, & Carroll, 2011; Vedal, 2013). Specifically, shame is only explored in one book chapter and one blog post. Interestingly enough, both sources rely on Elspeth Probyn’s *Blush: Many Faces of Shame* (2005), which I will explore in more depth later. The first and most thorough discussion of shame in the context of the writing center is Geller, Condon, and Carroll’s (2011) work around combating racism by exploring and learning from shameful moments. Acknowledging that they all are white, the authors write that this painfully intense experience of shame seems to be the stumbling block that accompanies both their personal discussions of race and racism, as well as what keeps their white tutors from engaging in productive discussions around these issues. The authors argue that since moments of shame illuminate failed attempts to connect on a human level with other people, these moments can become powerful sites of learning about the often unconscious ways whiteness, white privilege,

and racism negatively impact writing center sessions. Geller, Condon and Carroll believe these moments should be reflected on both personally and individually because the most uncomfortable experiences are the ones that can teach people the most. In her blog post, “Shame and the Writing Center” (2013), Lauren Vedal, returns to the work of Probyn (2005), and argues that feelings of shame associated with being a “bad writer” is what motivates many students to come to the writing center for help. Because of this, Vedal believes that part of the job of writing center tutors is to be shamelessly interested in the writer, the writing, and their topic. By expressing this interest explicitly, Vedal believes that tutors help calm and assuage feelings of overwhelming shame that the writer may feel when presenting a piece of writing that they feel is not up to par.

While this exploratory thinking about shame in the writing center is useful, it just does not account for the many critical and queer theorists who are currently working to understand shame (Probyn, 2005; Sedgwick, 2003; Ahmed, 2004; Munt, 2008; Rand, 2014; Fox, 2014). Therefore, in this chapter I will rely on a host of writings about shame to closely analyze the experiences of Josiah and Harper, two gay writing center consultants working in the same center. I will argue that a major force that shaped the perceptions of their gender and sexual identity in the center were the affective feelings of shame. In doing so, I hope to highlight a few of the many ways shame can operate within the writing center, and how shame can be used as a critical lens to draw attention to the nuanced and complex ways affect and identity are always impacting writing center work, even when consultants (and directors) are not aware of it. While many writing center practitioners may wonder what place the “negative” affect shame has in the comforting and welcoming space of the writing center, many queer theorists are working to reimagine the possibilities of shame (Probyn, 2005; Sedgwick, 2003; Ahmed, 2004; Munt, 2008;

Rand, 2014; Fox, 2014). Thus, before I analyze Josiah and Harper's accounts of their experiences, I will explore the multiple and at times conflicting ways queer theorists are writing about shame.

### **Queer Musings on Shame**

For many people, the painfully uncomfortable emotion that is shame should be discarded at the earliest possible second. Shame is something to be avoided at all costs. While there is plenty of recent scholarly psychological literature and self-help books that suggest you must rid yourself and life of shame (Bradshaw, 2005; Brown, 2007; Potter-Efron & Potter-Eron, 2009; Engel, 2010; Breggin, 2014), that is not the literature that you will find in this current section. I am interested in recent scholarly works in the fields of cultural, critical, and queer studies that is seeking to reclaim shame from those who argue that life would be better without it. Instead, I am interested in the works of scholars such as Probyn (2005), Sedgwick (2003), Ahmed (2004), Munt (2008), Rand (2014), Fox (2014), and many others, who have begun to understand that shame is not always inherently negative, specifically because it is tied to what it means to be human and thus can be as a heuristic tool to understand human relations and motivate action. I will use the different conceptions of shame I present here as analytical frames to better understand the way shame impacted Harper and Josiah's experience as writing center consultants.

Throughout *Blush: Faces of Shame* (2005) Elspeth Probyn, who relies heavily on the work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins, works to decenter the popular notion that shame is inherently negative, instead she argues that shame can be positive and productive. The main hook of her argument is that shame is an innate biological response that all humans are capable of, that in fact shame is a characteristic of what it means to be human (p. 33). Thus, for Probyn

shame is productive because it “illuminates our intense attachment to the world, our desire to be connected with others, and the knowledge that, as merely human, we will sometimes fail in our attempts to maintain those connections.” (p. 14). The moment when human beings fail to establish these connections with other human beings is precisely when Probyn (2005) believes that the emotion of shame is evoked. In her understanding, the want to be connected with other people is intimately related to interest, or the act of being interested in other people.

Interest constitutes lines of connection between people and ideas. It describes a kind of affective investment we have in others. When, for different reasons, that investment is questioned and interest is interrupted, we feel deprived. Crucially, that’s when we feel shame... Shame marks the break in connection. We have to care about something or someone to feel ashamed when that care and connection--our interest--is not reciprocated. (Probyn, 2005, p. 13)

The fact that we have to first care or be interested in an idea or person before shame can happen helps Probyn begin to reframe how people think about shame. Probyn takes this idea even further when she gives examples of non-Western cultures that use the emotion of shame to ensure equality, fairness, and ethics. Thus, shame is productive and useful because it “teaches us about our relations to others” (p. 35).

Just as Probyn (2005) is interested in how shame is made in social and relational interactions with other human beings, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is also interested in the social nature of shame. In *Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Sedgwick (2003) discusses how at the early age of three to seven months, infants begin to show the physical signs of shame. These signs of shame--eyes and head down--begin to occur in the infant when there is an interruption in the physical gaze between the caregiver and infant. This failure to

communicate then becomes part of the very early identity formation process of the infant (p. 36). From this detailed example, Sedgwick argues that throughout one's life shame and identity, and how it is both individual and social, plays an integral role in forming who we are as individuals. Because shame both shapes how individuals view and relate to themselves as well as others, Sedgwick believes that shame has a lot to offer the modern discussion of identity politics and particularly those of minority backgrounds (62-5). Thus, Sedgwick (2003) and Probyn (2005) believe that shame as an emotion has productive value in how it brings to the forefront of consciousness intense examples of what it means to be human and relate to other humans.

Ahmed (2004) explores the emotion of shame, specifically in the context of national shame and speech acts. While the national shame and speech acts sections are useful for thinking through shame on a more expansive scale, for this project, which is concerned with shame on a micro-level, her definitions of shame are the most useful. Ahmed believes that, "the very physicality of shame--how it works on and through bodies--means that shame also involves the de-forming and re-forming of bodily and social spaces, as bodies 'turn away' from the others who witness the shame" (p. 103). When one feels shame, one views themselves through the gaze of an imagined and/or present other and comes to feel that at their very core they are bad. In this way, shame is simultaneously individual and social. "The view of this other is the view that I have taken on in relation to myself, I see myself *as if I were* this other. My failure before this other hence is profoundly a failure of myself to myself" (p. 106). Thus, when feeling shame people construct an idealized other, an other that represents the social ideals or normative values of the people and society around them. Shame, then, is felt as "*the affective cost of not following the scripts of normative existence*" (Ahmed's emphasis, p. 107). Munt (2008) theorizes what Ahmed (2004) would call breaks with the scripts of normativity, or shame's re-forming and de-

forming effects, as attachments and detachments. Thus, much like Ahmed's focus on the ways in which shame can affect individual and social bodies, Munt (2008) believes that "shame can incite a wilful disintegration of collectivity, it can cause fragmentation, splitting and dissolution in all levels of the social body, the community, and within the psyche itself" (p. 26). This process of fragmentation, or what Fox (2014) calls ruptures, creates space in which ideals, and normative social practices can be reconfigured. In "Toward A Queerly Classed Analysis Of Shame: Attunement To Bodies In English Studies" (2014), Catherine Fox builds on Probyn (2005), Ahmed (2004), and Munt (2008)'s notion that experiencing shame causes room for transformative potential. She argues that universities and English Departments work to exclude and oppress faculty members who are queer and faculty members who are from working class backgrounds by shaming them when they are not civil and polite. By foregrounding her experiences as both a lesbian and working class body, she relies on Judith Butler's notion of the performativity of norms to argue that we can reimagine and change the sexual, and socio-economic norms of the academy by listening to, understanding, and writing about the body in shame.

This understanding of shame as a site for change is explored in detail in Erin Rand's (2014) *Reclaiming Queer: Activist Rhetorics of Resistance*. In this text, Rand explores how LGBTQ people throughout history have felt shame because their gender and sexual identity violates the normative practice of heterosexuality, otherwise known as heteronormativity. In her chapter on gay shame, Rand relates the potential shame has to change our relation to other people and society, as well as the specific gender and sexual norms these institutions are governed by, to the concept of rhetorical agency. Rand understands rhetorical agency to be "the ability for words and/or actions to come to make sense and therefore to create effects through

their particular formal and stylistic conventions. These conventions are...specific materializations of institutional power, and as such, they are both productive (they enable the force of a text) and constraining (they determine the limits of intelligibility)” (p. 21). For Rand then, the effects and possibilities of rhetorical agency can only be understood by examining the “positions within a structure of power from which discourse becomes intelligible” (p. 21). One way of beginning to locate and name these positions or degrees of power, and thus rhetorical agency, is to understand the feelings, emotions, and affects that are part of the lived experience that power structures cause in particular social groups. While all people, regardless of gender and sexual identity, can feel shame, this particular affect is intimately related to the history of LGBTQ people. One needs to look no farther than the AIDS crisis where “the management of AIDS...has always been inextricably linked...to the physical and emotional devastation wrought by homophobia and heteronormativity” (Rand, 2014, p. 130). Rand (2014) argues that ACT UP, the AIDS activist group which I explored in Chapter 1, used the “emotional devastation,” wrought by the oppressive heteronormative society as “affective ties of shared feeling” (p. 131). These shared emotional bonds around feelings of shame and anger enabled them to join together as a political collective insistent upon resisting and changing the way society labeled and viewed them. Thus, in this way shame acted as both an emotion that limited the rhetorical agency of LGBTQ people (they were shamed into feeling they were inherently bad because of their gender and sexual identity), while at the same time this shared feeling operated as site of rhetorical potential from which LGBTQ could speak back to and change the societal norms and narrative about their gender and sexual identities, and indeed, their overall worthiness as human beings. As I will explore in more depth later when I discuss the experiences of the two gay male consultants,

shame also operates as one of the main motivating factors for the ways in which LGBTQ people enact and perform their identity.

As queer theorists such as Probyn (2005), Sedgwick (2003), Ahmed (2004), Munt (2008), Rand (2014), Fox (2014), have worked to show shame is a multifaceted affect that is closely related to personal identity, ethics, relations with other people, and what those people value as normal. Shame is at its most complex when it is being felt in a particular moment. It is both felt deeply within bodies, while at the same between bodies. It wants people want to retreat inwardly and away from the cause of the feeling, while at the same time it manifests itself outwardly through a down turned glance and a reddened face. It can stun people into silence and possibly even in the same breath give them reason to act, resist, and seek change. Because of the complexity of this affect and the volatile ways it moves bodies to recognize things about themselves and others, because it is deeply a part of identities and what it means to be humans, I believe if the field of writing center studies begins to listen to it we can learn quite a bit about the one-on-one interactions between consultants and writers. Before we look at particular experiences, though, I want to provide a few other frameworks that will help make sense of my analysis of the interviews.

## **Other Frameworks**

### **Performativity**

Just as there are norms associated with being a writing consultant, such as the commonplace that we work to improve writers not writing (North, 1984), there are also norms that are associated with gender. In books such as *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and *Undoing Gender* (2004), Judith Butler theorizes that gender is neither stable nor static; rather, it is performative, in that gender is only recognized through the enactment of particular actions, movements, and discourse. For



Butler, performativity “must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practices by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (1993, p. 2). For Butler, *performance* is not *performativity*; the former refers to theatrical activity that foregrounds choice, selection, and time-bound activity (e.g., one puts on a dress and heels and goes to the office one day, but another day wears a pantsuit), while the latter understand that language and action are bound together in endlessly iterative activities: “they continue to signify in spite of their authors, and sometimes against their authors’ most precious intentions” (1993, p. 241). For Butler, what most of us see or experience each day is not biological sex but gender performances, not chromosomal sex, but ideologies of “male” or “female” that represent particular socially sanctioned performances. For the gay male consultants in this study, who perform genders that are not socially sanctioned or who violate norms, writing center consultations become spaces where they have constantly to negotiate the consequences of performing with or against the norm. As Butler (2004) notes in *Undoing Gender*, “[w]hen those practices are performed against the norm, at least one of two results can ensue: either a subversive denaturalization takes place where gender norms may be reconfigured or the person who performs them is punished for behaving unnaturally” (p. 55). Therefore, as Jonathan Rylander (2011) has also demonstrated, the performances of LGBTQ consultants may carry both physical and emotional consequences.

### **Working Closets**

The gendered performances of the LGBTQ consultants in this study, which may change based on the writers they are working with, can serve to mark them as LGBTQ, heterosexual, or something altogether less certain to those around them. Another term that marks or labels whether an LGBTQ individual has made their gender or sexual identity public is “the closet,”

thus being “out of the closet” means the LGBTQ person has made their sexuality and gender public, while being “in the closet” means they have not. In order to understand the complexity of the interviews in this study, it is important to complicate Denny’s (2005) articulation of passing and coming out in the writing center because it implies that one is either “out” or “in,” which just does not capture the complex realities of the consultants I interviewed.

For example, the consultants I interviewed may be out to the staff of the writing center one semester, but many times a new semester brings many changes including graduating consultants, new consultants, and non-returning consultants, and therefore they have to decide when, if, or how to come out to these new co-workers. The complicated notion of closeted spaces, filled with choices to come out or pass, or simply go unmarked, is further complicated by the various consultations any LGBTQ consultant faces on any day in the writing center. In efforts to facilitate a better understanding of these moments, I rely on Matthew Cox’s (2012) work around LGBTQ professionals in the workplace, specifically his theoretical concept of Working Closets. For Cox, “These Working Closets are complicated, layered, and unorthodox spaces wherein the individual (sometimes out of choice and sometimes by situational force) conceals or volunteers her or his sexual orientation (even partially)” (p. 41). Instead of the all-or-nothing binary that the traditional “closet” evokes, Working Closets help represent the idea that for LGBTQ people, coming out of the closet is not a one time thing, but instead a tricky and constant set of decisions that are faced throughout our lives. LGBTQ people continually find themselves having to come out in the same situational contexts and many times to the same people (Cox, p. 41). While LGBTQ consultants navigate these closets in many aspects of their lives, they also navigate these closets in the writing center. Behind Cox’s argument, as well, is the idea that in making choices about consent, about who, when, where, how, and if, LGBTQ

people also “work” their closet, deploying it strategically when they need to retreat for comfort, emerge for visibility, or a host of different partially in/partially out activities as the rhetorical moment requires.

### **Tying it All Together**

I have spent the first half of this chapter presenting literature on shame, performativity, and Working Closets because they are the frameworks that will significantly inform the analysis of the gay male consultants’ experiences that I will present in the second half of this chapter. While I discussed each of these in different sections, they are all intimately related to one another and because of this are woven together throughout my analysis. For example, Cox (2012) explains that shame is a central motivator to where and how LGBTQ people express or perform their identities, which then of course either marks them as “out,” “in,” or somewhere on the range of the spectrum that is the closet. Thus, in my application of Cox’s (2012) Working Closets as a lens to understand the interviews I conducted for this chapter, I rely heavily on shame as the main emotion/affect that *triggers* whether or not the participants decided to express or withhold their gender and sexual identity in consultations. Remember, the notion of the trigger is something I presented in the analysis section of Chapter 2 as a way to begin to understand the relationship I noticed between emotion/affect and moments of gender and sexual identity in the writing center. That is, I noticed that particular emotions (in this chapter: shame) triggered the gay male consultants to either express or withhold their gender and sexual identity in a particular moment in time. I will argue then that this decision to express or withhold, which is always partial as many aspects of gender and sexual identity performance are unconscious (see performativity section), had particular impacts on the consultants work with writers. Another way, then, to read or understand “expressing” or “withholding” identities in the theoretical

context of Working Closets is that *expressing* means performing one's gender and sexual identity in a way that signifies a certain degree of being *out of the closet*, while *withholding* means performing one's gender and sexual identity in a way that signifies a certain degree of being *in the closet*. For this chapter then, every mention of *expressing* (i.e. being out of the closet) and *withholding* (i.e. being in the closet) can be understood as a result of the emotional/affective trigger of shame.

### **Josiah**

As a writing center consultant, Josiah thinks that his main role is “encouragement and developing in the student a sense of belonging and trust in the academic community on campus.” He believes that many students are intimidated and uncomfortable with certain aspects of college; therefore, he has constructed his role as a peer-tutor as, in part, to make students feel comfortable. As we will see, the fact that he understands his role as a peer-tutor or consultant to be related to comfort has a great deal of impact on the way in which he understands his gender and sexual identity in the writing center.

### **Withhold**

As I mentioned in the previous section, withhold means performing one's gender and sexual identity in a way that signifies a certain degree of being in the closet. This particular coding category, as I will demonstrate, encapsulates the way that Josiah enacts and thinks about his gender and sexual identity within the writing center. Specifically, Josiah does not place much emphasis on his gender and sexuality in the center, but he is definitely aware of it. He notices it most often when other LGBTQ students come in for help with their writing, and when this happens, “they tend to gravitate towards me pretty quickly if they can.” This shared connection and sense of community that draws them to him, though, remains unspoken:

“In fact, even with my fellow queer students who ... I have tutored I don’t bring it [gender and sexuality] up. Even if they are writing about queer experiences, I don’t necessarily feel obligated to bring up that I share that experience, because I want to try to also come with some objectivity and give them that assurance that is not just....I don’t know. I feel like it isn’t just that relevant for the most part” (Josiah).

Even with presumably homosexual students, he decides to withhold his gender and sexual identity, which I would argue is a result affective feelings of shame that the heteronormative institution he is a part of causes him to feel. For Josiah, “it is not something that I’m hiding, but unless I feel like it is important to bring up I’m not going to. I mean it is not relevant.” A very similar statement was made by Brooke, who as I discussed in chapter 2, works in the same center as Josiah. She says, “I don’t really bring my sexuality to the writing center because it is all about the students I am tutoring. It is not about me” (Brooke).

Both of these examples from Brooke and Josiah, but specifically Josiah’s decision not to disclose his identity to other queer students, illustrate Cox (2012)’s notion of the Working Closet (see Working Closet section above) occurring in the writing center. When presented with these Working Closet moments at the writing center (motivated, I believe by shame), and their inherent choices to withhold or express gender and sexual identity, Josiah attempts to withhold his identity by controlling his performance. While Butler (1993, 2004) would argue that any attempt to control performance is always incomplete, as many aspects of gender and sexuality are performed unconsciously, Cox’s theory of Working Closets recognizes that many LGBTQ people may attempt to “self-closet” in order to gain some sense of agency. As I will discuss in more depth later, it is important to recognize that not only can shame work as something that limits agency, but also as an affect that can enhance agency. Thus, I believe that Josiah withholds

his identity in the writing center, which is triggered by feelings of shame, in order to gain some sense of agency in how he is perceived by the writers he works with. Articulating this point more clearly, Josiah says, “I don’t bring ... my sexuality, I mean yeah it is with me of course, but I’m not focused on it in the writing center at all.”

In suggesting that shame is the motivating factor that causes Josiah to closet or withhold his gender and sexual identity, I do not mean to imply that he is ashamed of his sexuality; rather, I would suggest that the heteronormative, hierarchical nature of the institution in which he works has institutionalized shame, and its uncomfortable feelings, as the consequence for any non-normative practice performed against the status-quo (Munt, 2008). If Josiah’s center has allowed/encouraged him to believe that his sexuality and gender performance will produce uncomfortable feelings for clients, because it would expose them to a way of being that is not sanctioned by the culture or university at large, then Josiah may have internalized some of those feelings of shame. Probyn (2005), however, asks us to reimagine these moments where shame occurs as failed attempts at human connection and instead of recognizing them as negative, to see them for what they can teach us about the people and institutions we are a part of. As such, Probyn (2005), and Geller, Condon, & Carroll (2011), who use her work around shame to help combat racism in writing center work, might ask Josiah not to run from moments where shame could occur, but to explore them in attempt to better understand the relationships it highlights. For example, if he is made to feel that his gender and sexual identity are inappropriate in the center and is thus shamed into withholding his identities, how does this affect his consulting practices? Would he be a better consultant if the space and people around him were more accepting? How do these feelings of shame, then, affect LGBTQ writers that come into the space? Such exploratory work would require a structural level of support, however: it is not

sufficient to expect an undergraduate student to have mastered these complexities and simultaneously to create the working atmosphere needed to escape the effects of shame, especially on their own without staff and administrator support.

While Josiah may withhold his gender and sexual identity within the writing center, outside of the writing center, it is a very different story:

“Now, of course outside, if we are talking personal relationship or whatever, then of course it is different. I will express my own opinions and everything more specifically and concretely. I think my opinions tend to be on the more, you know, far left I think at least in the context of my campus being in the south a lot of queer people are very conservative about it. They are very hesitant to go to things like Pride parades, be involved with stuff like that, they have a very negative opinion of things like that. I, on the other hand, am like, I think everyone should feel like they could be out and proud. I think there is some ... confrontational dynamics to that but I think that is perfectly appropriate and ok” (Josiah).

How Josiah conceives of and embodies his identity within the writing center and outside of the writing center are very different. In the writing center, he talks about assuming a more passive role, while outside of the writing center, he is more “out and proud.” While he cites issues of objectivity and professionalism for this change in how he views and embodies his identity, he tends to talk primarily about *comfort* as the motivating factor, though not necessarily his own comfort:

“But in the context of like writing tutoring or GSAs dealing with other students, if I’m in like a leadership role, I try to take a more hands off approach. Because I want everyone to feel like it is a welcoming, safe and inclusive environment, to express themselves however they feel comfortable.”

For Josiah, his liberal beliefs and “out and proud” attitude “make a lot of them [students and co-workers] uncomfortable, so I try to back off from pushing that so that they can feel comfortable just coming to that common space with other queer people.” Josiah has developed a sense of himself-in-context, a sense of himself as a professional among other professionals in the writing center. As such, there may be certain behaviors or ways of being that Josiah has decided are “professional” and others that are clearly not. Determining what self to present in this context represents how Josiah engages with his own “working closet.” If we read this experience in the context that he believes his role is to help student writers feel comfortable in the center, then his attempt to “closet” certain elements of his identity, because of feelings of shame, makes sense. At the same time, researchers and writing center directors should consider the broader questions of what counts as “professional” in a student context like the writing center, and what it means for LGBTQ students to feel/believe that core elements of their identities are “inappropriate” or “unprofessional.”

Now that we have seen how one consultant thinks about his gay identity in the writing center, and how it is possibly related to feelings of shame stemming from the heteronormative institution he is a part of, let’s take a more detailed look at how shame can affect consulting practices.

### **Harper**

Harper believes that his main role as a writing center consultant is to empower the students he works with as writers, and to help them embrace the identity of a writer. Just as Josiah’s understanding of his role as a consultant is vital to the ways in which he embodies his gender and sexual identity within the writing center, Harper’s belief that he should empower student writers also relates to how he understands his gender and sexual identity and its place in



the writing center. Unlike, Josiah though, the stories Harper tells are representative of two coding categories: withhold and express. In efforts to be clear, I just want to reemphasize the definitions of these codes: express means performing one's gender and sexual identity in a way that signifies a certain degree of being out of the closet, while withhold means performing one's gender and sexual identity in a way that signifies a certain degree of being in the closet.

### **Withhold and Express**

While working at the writing center Harper usually expresses his gender and sexual identity. In fact, during each of his first two semesters he had disclosed his sexual orientation to the entire staff and was greeted with acceptance. During his third semester though, the hiring of a homophobic tutor challenged his usual expression and openness about his sexuality. Harper describes the tutor as "very southern, very stuck in his ways and southern habits and part of that was his distaste or his disdain for the gays." Harper discovered that the tutor was homophobic because of offensive remarks the tutor made while Harper was working with a transgender writer. "The way he said it [offensive remarks]...actually caused that person, the transgender person, to walk away from the writing center and never" return for another session (Harper).

In efforts to avoid the consultant making similar offensive remarks about himself, remarks that I believe would have resulted in feelings of shame, Harper "would always try to go over the top and be like super masculine, and anything that was associated with being gay, I would move myself away from" (Harper). In Cox (2012)'s terms, this consultant presented Harper with a Working Closet moment, and Harper decided, to the best of his ability, not to express his gay identity. Another way of beginning to understand the effects the homophobic consultant had on Harper and the overall atmosphere of the writing center is to think about normative gender practices within the center. For the two semesters before the homophobic

consultant was hired, Harper felt accepted and comfortable with his gender and sexual identity while in the writing center; that is the center was a place where non-heterosexual gender and sexual identities were at least made to feel welcome. The presence of the homophobic tutor, and his offensive remarks made within earshot of a transgender writer, began to change this atmosphere and at least in Harper's understanding reinstate heterosexuality as the normative practice. If we return to Ahmed (2004)'s explanation of shame, which "involves the de-forming and re-forming of bodily and social spaces," (p. 103) we can begin to see that at least one possible way of understanding Harper's need to change the way he was perceived within the center was because of the feelings of shame that came with knowing that his gender and sexual identity violated the new heteronormative expectations and atmosphere created by the consultant.

Feelings of shame then, I believe, resulted in him changing his physical performance of his gender during this semester to what he saw as more stereotypical masculine acts. For example, he wouldn't cross his legs or say things such as, "hey girl." The presence of this other co-worker led him to perform his gender and sexual identity in very different ways while he was in the writing center. While this alternative performance affected him personally, Harper said that he also noticed that it changed his sessions. When he felt comfortable expressing his identity in the writing center, Harper would spend the first part of the session talking and building rapport with the client. While their talk might be centered on the paper, sometimes it would be 15-20 minutes before they actually looked at the text. This openness and rapport building was how he connected with the writers. But, when he changed his performance, Harper began to focus solely on the text:

"I wasn't as open, because I used to try to open up my emotional walls so it can make them feel at ease. ... I realized how cold I got and I was like, that's not good, that's

definitely not cool at all. So, it actually affected the way I worked with clients because I wasn't as open which is usually how I connect with my students" (Harper).

Probyn (2005) argues that shame happens when "break[s] in connection" (p. 13) occur between people, and this is exemplified by the above quote where Harper explores how what I am calling shame caused him to become cold and disconnected from the writers he works with. Specifically then, Harper's feelings of shame about his own identity, that came with knowing that he did not fit with the heterosexual ideals that were aggressively expressed by the homophobic consultant, actually changed his consulting practices, and thus impacted the writers he worked with. Withholding his identity in these sessions caused him to shift his focus from the writer of the paper to only the text itself, which of course goes against North's (1984) foundational principle that writing centers work to improve writers, not only writing. To truly help a writer develop her skills, as writing center consultants are asked to do, one must first acknowledge and connect with this writer on some sort of interpersonal level. Not building this connection made his sessions very cold and impersonal, and caused him not to worry about making his clients comfortable. While Josiah thinks that expressing his identities could cause some students discomfort, Harper uses his identities as a way to make the students feel comfortable and to relate to them as human beings: "But when I feel it is appropriate, I always self-disclose something about my identity that shows that I'm human too" (Harper). One example of Harper focusing not only on the text, but also the writer, which happens when he disavows feelings of shame that stem from heteronormative expectations and instead uses his identity to connect with people, was the time that we worked with an older, female writer who was working on a paper about the LGBTQ community. Through his conversation with her, in which he shared that he was gay, he learned that she was motivated to write the paper to learn

more about her daughter who had just come out to her as a lesbian. Through sharing his experiences as a gay person he was able to help her with her relationship with her daughter, as well as her writing. He learned about this when she returned to the center, and told him that: “Not only did she get an A on her paper, but the relationship she has with her daughter is so much better because she knows what questions to ask, and she knows how to have that conversation. I keep thinking like if I had not self-disclosed and I had just been about the text for that one it would have been a whole completely different conference” (Harper).

After the semester he spent working with the homophobic tutor was over, he reflected on how his shift in the way he performed his gender and sexual identity within the center had affected his consulting practices. With particular sessions in mind, like the one I just described, he realized that he was a better consultant when he expressed his gender and sexual identity within the writing center, particularly because it allowed him to connect with his writers. “Once I realized how much it affected and impacted my conferences with my students I quickly changed how I felt over it because the way I work with my students and the way I work with my clients is much more important than how one staff member feels about me being homosexual, me being gay, because at the end of the day I really don’t care about him. I’m not here to help him, I’m here to help the students.” (Harper).

For Harper, then, these feelings of shame gave him reason to pause and reflect on his tutoring practice and the way that these feelings were influencing his ability to work with writers. Investigating and truly thinking through these feelings of shame and how they impacted his sessions illuminated his “intense attachment to the world” and his “desire to be connected with others” (Probyn, 2005, p. 14). Therefore, when he realized he was failing to help his writers to the best of his ability, an ability that hinges upon him establishing an interpersonal connection

with them, he decided he needed to bring his entire self into conferences, regardless of what the homophobic tutor thought. This critical self-reflection about particular social interactions and ethical considerations of how to treat others, highlights how shame becomes productive and useful. For Harper, this intense evaluation of his actions and how they negatively impacted his writers led him to change the way he performed his gender and sexual identity within the center. Being more open and expressive of his gay identity allowed him to begin connecting with writers in a way that was not possible when he was trying to act “stereotypically masculine.” Brandon, another consultant that I interviewed, echoes Harper’s experience around how performing stereotypically masculine negatively impacts sessions. Brandon said that before he accepted his sexuality, he worked to be overly masculine by playing many sports and ultimately “acting as masculine as he could” in order to pass as straight. When working with masculine writers in the center he will sometimes shift his performance to these more masculine acts. Specifically he says that he “will sometimes tone it back or talk about world series or god knows what. But that’s frustrating” (Brandon). In his view, acting more masculine:

“...harms it [the session]. I think often times I will see a negative reaction from the “jock” that I am working with where they are almost frustrated in me for not being myself because they have recognized that I have toned it back. I think when people are working one-to-one it is really easy to understand a person and understand their fluctuations and how they think. I think that’s the other thing, right. Then you feel *guilty*, and you go home, and you are like, ‘why I didn’t say something there?’, ‘why did I do that?’, but that’s how sexuality works.

Thus, not only does the shift in performance harm the interpersonal relationship between Brandon and the writers he works with by causing feelings of frustration, it also causes him to feel guilty, which of course could also be read and understood as the very similar emotion of

shame. More importantly, though, Brandon's experience highlights the fact that Harper is not alone in the fact that feelings of shame caused him to critically reflect on his own identity and how it impacted his work with writers. Thus, as Rand (2014) writes about, shame is intimately related to agency. We can see evidence of this by the fact that it causes Brandon and Harper--and by extension other gay male consultants--to act. I believe there are numerous actions triggered by shame in these moments, but specifically shame causes a decision to be made about whether or not and to what degree to express their gender and sexual identity, and shame also causes, as Brandon and Harper both discuss, critical reflection and interrogation of their identities and its impact on working with writers.

For Harper, though, not only did these feelings of shame act as a catalyst for him to change his consulting practices, it also led him to confront the homophobic tutor during a staff meeting. While Harper hoped it would be a civil conversation, "it kind of went in a way I didn't want it to go, like an actual argument" (Harper). The staff, though, was supportive of Harper and was on his side. Although confrontation is not always ideal, I believe this confrontation was necessary for Harper to put a stop to his own feelings of alienation and to make the center a more welcoming space for everyone. Rand (2014) would ask us to understand Harper's experience with shame as intimately related to agency. That is, the feelings of shame caused Harper to act in multiple ways. In the beginning, shame caused him to enact his gender and sexual identity in more "masculine" ways, while later shame caused him to embrace his gay identity and then to confront the homophobic tutor. Therefore, one way of thinking about shame in the writing center is to understand that it causes people to act. Those actions, though, can be both positive, negative, or anywhere in between. This last point is very important, I do not think it is accurate to describe shame as "good" or "bad," but instead as an affect that is intimately related to

agency, as a feeling that literally “affects” one’s potential for action. This potential for action, though, can be both limiting and empowering as is evidenced by the multiple ways in which shame impacted Harper’s experiences in the writing center.

### **Conclusion**

Josiah and Harper are different sides of the same coin, at least in how they navigate feelings of shame and its relation to their gay identities in their respective writing center which, like all other centers, universities, and hierarchical structures in general, are influenced by the logics of heteronormativity. For Josiah, his perceived job and role as a consultant, and his embodiment and expression of his gender and sexual identity, are at odds with each other. In efforts to ease the tension between the two, he constantly withholds and suppresses his gender and sexual identities while he is in the center. Harper, on the other hand, does not believe he can tutor effectively if he does not embody and embrace his gender and sexual identities. When the presence of a homophobic tutor caused him to change how he performed his gender and sexuality, Harper became cold and focused only on the text and not the writer. In fact, he uses his confidence in his identities, which he learned from this experience, to empower students to be more confident in their abilities and identities as writers. Both Josiah and Harper deal with their gender and sexuality, and the feelings of shame that are caused by heteronormative gender expectations in different ways. This complex relationship between identity and shame impacts how effectively they can perform as writing consultants, helping them to make connections (or disconnections) with student writers and other consultants. These interviews suggest that writing centers should pay greater attention to the specificity of LGBTQ experiences in writing centers, specifically when it comes to the affective feelings of shame. Truly recognizing that shameful experiences do not have to be inherently negative, and that in fact they can be the catalyst for the

reconfiguration of gender norms and more ethical consulting practices is a good place for writing center practitioners interested in learning about the experiences of their LGBTQ consultants to start.



## Chapter 4: Attraction

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored shame and how it spurred consultants to action and operated as a means to limit and extend agency. In this chapter, I want to theorize and discuss the ways that attraction and gay male identity function to create spaces in the writing center in which heteronormativity (the powerful set of social expectations which dictates that all intimate relationships have to exist between men and women) is called into question and possibly up-ended. I will refer to this metaphorical “space” as counterpublics, a phrase introduced by queer theorist Michael Warner in his 2002 book *Publics and Counterpublics*. While I will define and discuss counterpublics in more depth later, one can begin to think of these spaces as “counter” to and transformative of dominant culture’s heteronormative gender expectations. Counterpublic spaces are, for the sake of brevity, places where heteronormativity is questioned. As an analytical frame, counterpublics will allow me to discuss the potential results and changes that occur when same-sex attraction is experienced, and how that can begin to question heteronormative gender and sexual expectations. It is important to note that I will be discussing same-sex attraction as an emotion/affect that, when felt, triggers and creates these counterpublic spaces in which the consultant’s gender and sexual identity is foregrounded. Just as shame was the trigger for moments of agency and identity negotiation in the last chapter, in this chapter I will discuss attraction as triggering counterpublic spaces where the gay male consultants’ gender and sexual identity, and its “nonnormative” status, is highlighted. Both in explicating the literature around these moments and analyzing a specific instance of these moments, I hope to articulate a way of thinking about the effects that attraction has on tutorial interactions as well as on the gay male

consultant body which, as I will show in the next section, has been consistently erased and marginalized in writing center literature and conversations. One way that this has occurred is through the paucity of scholarship that addresses the affects/emotions that LGBTQ consultants face. In the same way that shame has received little attention in writing center scholarship, same-sex attraction has also failed to garner the attention of scholars, which I would argue is because of the heteronormative assumptions that are made about what is and is not appropriate in the writing center. Specifically then, this chapter seeks to build on the work I did in the previous chapter by expanding on the answers to my research questions: 1) How does experiencing shame or attraction in the context of a writing center session impact, if at all, the writing center session? 2) How can a queer theoretical reading of emotion/affect influence writing center work?

### **Literature Review**

In the history of writing center scholarship that began in the 1980s, only two articles (Pemberton, 1996; Wilde 2003) specifically discuss physical attraction, neither of which include same-sex attraction as a possibility. While one would guess that same-sex attraction has been mentioned in the larger body of scholarly literature published about LGBTQ gender and sexual identity in the context of writing centers (Darrup, 1994; Sloan, 1997; Jukuri, 2000; Denny, 2005; 2010; Geller, Condon, & Carroll, 2011; Green, 2011; Suhr-Systma & Brown, 2011; Rylander, 2011; Doucette, 2012; Dickerson & Rylander, 2012; Pauliny, 2012; Simpkins, 2013; Ballingall, 2013; Sloan & Rihn, 2013; Rihn, 2014, 2014b) each of these articles, book chapters, and books fail to discuss same-sex attraction in any depth. Because there has been so little published literature on same-sex physical attraction in educational environments--a paucity that becomes even more stark when composition and writing center literature is examined--this literature review pulls literature from a host of differing of fields, including the fields of writing center

studies, education, and composition, which discusses sexuality and attraction from a range of theoretical perspectives including critical pedagogy, critical race theory, feminist theory, and queer theory, into conversation with each other. In so doing, I hope to highlight how queer bodies are marginalized by heteronormativity, and how focusing on all emotions, but specifically attraction, begins to return attention to bodies that have been consistently erased.

I argue that by becoming attuned to how gay male bodies within the writing center experience physical attraction, we can begin to challenge the field of writing center studies to change the ways in which the embodied experiences of queer consultants and writers are overlooked and not deemed valuable of discussion. If the field begins to interrogate the ways that queer attraction affects LGBTQ consultants and their consulting practices we can begin to better understand the heterosexual assumptions that dictate how writing center professionals believe bodies should interact. By questioning heterosexual privilege, which discussions of same-sex or queer attraction does, the field can better understand the at times unconscious ways that heteronormative assumptions about bodies create an environment that is limiting to all people, but especially those writers and consultants who identify as LGBTQ. In short, I believe discussions of same-sex attraction, and heterosexual attraction for that matter, can help create more equitable environments that do not repress consultant and writer bodies, but instead understands them as the site where all learning happens. Returning attention to embodied ways of knowing the world, helps combat oppression, which should be one of the many goals of the field of writing center studies (hooks, 1994; 2003; 2010; Freedman & Holmes, 2003; Godbee, Ozias, & Tang; 2015).

Wilde (2003)'s, "Exploring Issues of Attraction in Writing Center Tutorials," presents the results of an anonymous survey administered once during 2001 and once during 2002. The

survey was taken by 12 female tutors and 7 male tutors that worked at the writing center where the author served as a graduate assistant. Over a third of the participants believed “attraction to a student positively affected a tutoring session,” while a quarter of respondents believed it negatively impacted the session. A little less than a third of the respondents said it had little to no effect on a tutoring session. The only scholarly literature that Wilde (2003) draws from for her results focus solely on male/female and female/male attraction. Both of these articles that Wilde discusses conclude that the more attractive a teacher or tutor found a writer the more positive they would rate their writing. While the notion that higher rates of perceived attraction lead to more positive perceptions of writing is interesting, the results are severely limited in that they completely ignore LGBTQ experience. Wilde (2003) and the literature she references does not begin to discuss the possible relationship between same-sex attraction and perceived writing ability. This failure to include LGBTQ people only perpetuates LGBTQ marginalization and erasure, and serves as one example of the heteronormative research and conversations I want to intervene.

In the same way that Wilde (2003) approaches heterosexual attraction as normative behavior without even the possibility for other sexual identities, Pemberton’s (1996) “Safe Sex in the Writing Center” also never discusses issues of same-sex attraction. However, Pemberton argues that heterosexual attraction is something that should be discussed in the writing center because of the interpersonal nature of our work. He writes, “Writing conferences are really quite intimate. Two people--often of different genders but just as often similar in age and experience--spend a half hour or an hour sitting close together and collaborating intensely on a written text” (p. 14). Because of the intimate nature of writing center conferences “feelings of sexual attraction” (p. 14) could possibly occur in either the tutor, the writer, or both. He goes on to

explore a time in which him and a female writer decided to get coffee after working with each other. While he interpreted her gesture as friendly, when he told her that he was in a relationship their coffee date awkwardly ended. When the female writer returned to work with him after their coffee experience, the session went horribly wrong. Pemberton (1996) goes on to argue that writing center professionals need to do a better job at discussing attraction in professional development settings in order to prepare consultants for moments like the one he experienced. While both Wilde (2003) and Pemberton (1996) do talk about an issue that is somewhat taboo, they do so in a way that only reinforces and reproduces heteronormativity and its erasure of LGBTQ bodies and experiences. Both of these practices, (reproducing heteronormativity and erasing the queer body) happen much too commonly in the field of writing center studies and society at large. Because the literature that does exist in writing center scholarship, and other educational research, has overlooked queer attraction, now I want to turn my attention to a set of articles from the larger discipline of rhetoric and composition which discuss how attraction and focusing on embodied experiences is important in educational environments.

In a chapter by bell hooks (1994), “Eros, Eroticism, and the Pedagogical Process,” the renowned feminist and critical race theorist discusses how Western educational systems and institutions operate as if “there is a split between the body and mind” (p. 191). This notion causes educators and students to deny the body and only focus on the mind, which as she argues can have negative effects on students. hooks subscribes to emotions as the larger, more complex interactions that occur both within the mind and body of individuals as a result of interactions with others. Thus, hooks’s frame of recognizing both the mind and the body of individuals makes her approach fit with the understanding of affect that I have used throughout this thesis. To illustrate the negative effects of the mind/body split, hooks tells a story about how she

realized she was “erotically drawn” (p. 192) to a male student only after a school therapist contacted her to discuss why she treated him so harshly during their interactions in class. hooks argues that her educational training both as a teacher and student had not prepared her to deal with attraction in the classroom. The very fact that she was erotically drawn or attracted to this particular student--that she recognized his body and not just his mind--violated the mind/body split that she had unconsciously learned. Her “naive way of coping with feelings in the classroom that [she] had been taught never to have was to deflect (hence [her] harsh treatment of him), repress, and deny” (192). Because attempting to repress and deny her attraction to the student led her to treat him poorly, hooks argues that educators need to use passion in the classroom as a way of focusing on their own embodied feelings as well as those of their students. This experience caused her to understand that repressing passions in the classroom could psychologically and emotionally wound students. Embracing eros, which can be understood broadly as passion, desire, and love, means denying the body-mind-split and truly dealing with the physical bodies--and accompanied emotions--of students. hooks understands the embracing of the full person to be an act of radical and critical education that helps students learn to live “self-actualizing” lives. For writing center practitioners, and the larger argument of this chapter, embracing eros and attraction allows the field to deny the oppressive mind/body split and truly empower the people who have largely been erased in the field’s conversations and research.

Just as hooks’ argues that educators should focus on and use eros in educational environments to relate with and empower students by centering their bodies, Godbee, Ozias, and Tang (2015) argue that using movement-based professional development workshops that utilize consultant bodies in the writing center can help develop more racially just practices. This focus on the body is important, they argue, because “our bodies and the spaces we inhabit shape our

identities and carry legacies of social structuring, power, oppression, marginalization, injustice--deep inequities that are very much a part of our everyday lives in writing centers and in the teaching of writing” (p. 82). They continue to argue that too often in the writing center--and as hooks would add, all Western educational environments--we become detached from our bodies and seek to deny the very embodied experiences, feelings, and perceptions that dictate and affect the ways in which we interact in the world. In efforts to recenter the body, which has been the site of racial oppression in the writing center and other institutions, they argue for the practice of critical tutor education through movement-based workshops. By engaging with “issues of identity and power...critical tutor education acknowledges the importance of bodies and spaces as sites for knowledge-making in order to more fully understand the interesting and systemic nature of people’s lived experiences with literacies and learning...” (p. 82-3). In this context, then, I am asking the field of writing center studies to began practicing a form of critical tutor education that empowers and intervenes in the oppressive history that LGBTQ people have witnessed.

Specifically, I want to extend and connect Godbee, Ozias, and Tang (2015)’s arguments about critical tutor education, the body, and systems of oppression to the work that is being done in the field of composition as it pertains to LGBTQ and queer identities, sexualities, and particularly heteronormativity (Banks, 2003; Alexander & Banks, 2004; Monson and Rhodes, 2004; Alexander, 2008; Alexander & Wallace, 2009). In their 2009 article, “Queer Rhetorical Agency: Questioning Narratives of Heteronormativity” David L. Wallace and Jonathan Alexander claim that the field of rhetoric and composition needs an updated notion of rhetorical agency. This new version, what they refer to as queer rhetorical agency, highlights the heteronormative logics that underpin the ways discourse and language work to uphold the

hetero/homo binary that marginalizes, others, and oppresses LGBTQ people. The notion of queer rhetorical agency that Wallace & Alexander (2009) discuss is different from Rand's (2014) notion of agency that I discussed in Chapter 4. Specifically, Rand's (2014) discussion of agency is intimately related to shame, while Wallace & Alexander's (2009), is broader in scope. Wallace & Alexander (2009) argues that teaching students about queer rhetorical agency, then, would help them "become active agents for intervention and change" (p. 795).

Just as Godbee, Ozias, and Tang (2015) present their notion of critical tutor education through movement-based workshops as an intervention into systems of racial oppression, Alexander and Wallace (2009) present queer rhetorical agency as an intervention into systems of heteronormativity that oppress LGBTQ people. Specifically, Alexander and Wallace's discussion of queer theorist Michael Warner's notion of publics and counterpublics is useful in thinking about how discourse functions within heteronormative, dominant culture (what Warner calls publics) and marginalized, homosexual cultures (what Warner calls counterpublics). In their explanation of Warner's concept, Alexander and Wallace quote his book *Publics and Counterpublics* (2005) at length when they write:

In distinguishing between publics and counterpublics, Warner maintains that "Dominant publics are by definition those that can take their discourse pragmatics and their lifeworlds for granted, misrecognizing the indefinite scope of their expansive address as universality or normalcy" (122). These are publics that assume that their "lifeworlds" are normative, perhaps even above question and critical engagement. In contrast, "Counterpublics are 'counter' to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining stranger sociality and its reflexivity...Counterpublics are spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesis of scene making will be transformative,



not replicative merely" (122). A counterpublic does not assume that its positions, views, or investments can be 'taken for granted,' or that its self-understanding can pass as 'normalcy.' Rather, it serves as a potential space for critique of what otherwise passes for normative, natural, and assumed (Alexander & Wallace, 2009, p. 804).

I quote their article at length because their explanation shows how counterpublics work to both question what is normative and then change or transform this normative practice. Thinking of same-sex attraction, and the counterpublic space it triggers, as a site where heterosexual gender norms are questioned and possibly changed, is a generative way to begin thinking about the complex relationship between LGBTQ identity and the affect/emotion of attraction. This relationship is similar to my discussion of shame in the last chapter. Just as shame served as an emotional/affective trigger that invoked moments of identity and caused Harper and Josiah to withhold or express that identity, we can understand same-sex attraction as an emotional trigger that creates a counterpublic space. In this counterpublic space that is created when same-sex attraction is felt, the gender norms of heterosexuality (the public) are brought into question and heteronormative gender expectations are potentially "transformed." As gender scholar Judith Butler reminds us in *Undoing Gender* (2004),

"[w]hen those practices are performed against the norm, at least one of two results can ensue: either a subversive denaturalization takes place where gender norms may be reconfigured or the person who performs them is punished for behaving unnaturally" (p. 55).

Thus, counterpublics are spaces where heterosexual gender norms are either denaturalized and changed, or where the LGBTQ person is "punished for behaving unnaturally." While I have made this discussion heavily theoretical, more simply we can understand counterpublics to be

moments or instances where the LGBTQ person feels physically attracted to another person in an environment where they either consciously or unconsciously know that their feelings are coming in contact with the heteronormative status quo that falsely dictates which bodies are supposed to be attracted to others. By focusing on and understanding these spaces and moments in the writing center where same-sex attraction triggers a focus on the LGBTQ person's body and their experiences, we can begin to understand how LGBTQ consulting practices are affected when consultants face these moments that society has taught them should not occur. In this next section, I explore one such moment in detail, while also comparing it with smaller quotes and vignettes from other participants I interviewed.

## **Harper**

### **Attraction, Uncomfortable**

When Harper felt attracted to a male writer over the course of multiple writing center sessions, a counterpublic space was created. For him, these moments of attraction were extremely uncomfortable because he was having feelings that he described as “unprofessional.” Harper never explicitly defined what he thought professionalism meant, but his interview reveals that his definition of professionalism was informed by heterosexual culture, and at odds with his experiences as a gay male person. He was trying to fit into this imagined and constructed role of “professional tutor” that was especially difficult when he felt feelings of attraction. This dissonance that he felt in these counterpublic spaces between his embodied experiences of same-sex attraction and the idealized role of a professional tutor, which again was heavily informed by heteronormativity, caused him to feel very uncomfortable. That is, he felt discomfort because feeling attracted to a male writer violated the role of professional that he was being asked to embody. Because of his constant feelings of discomfort when he felt attracted to a writer, the two

main coding categories that I will discuss in this section is attraction and uncomfortable. While Harper says that he has felt attracted to or had a crush on multiple writers throughout his time working at the writing center, I want to focus on his experiences with a writer called Andrew, who Harper worked with for over two years.

Andrew and Harper had been in a class together the semester before Andrew first came to the writing center, and during this class Harper had developed a crush on him. The first time Andrew came to the center, Harper decided not to work with him because he was so nervous; after all, he remembered Andrew from their class together and he recognized that he had been/was attracted to him. When I asked Harper about his decision to not work with Andrea, Harper said: “I realized like I’m too wrapped up in him being my crush that I can’t really help him the way I need to help him.” But the next time Andrew came into the writing center, all of the other consultants were occupied, so Harper had to work with him. Andrew, a 6’5”, Brazilian basketball player with very long legs, sat down at the table to begin the session and their knees kept brushing against each others, and, as Harper recounts to himself, “this, this isn’t good, this isn’t good at all.” Harper describes this first interaction with Andrew as extremely uncomfortable, and that he had to mentally work very hard to stay focused on the actual session.

Why was this interaction so uncomfortable for Harper that it would cause him to expend more mental and emotional energy than he usually would? Queer theorist Sara Ahmed would argue that Harper felt so very uncomfortable and aware of that uncomfot because his feelings of attraction does not fit with the “scripts” of heteronormativity (Ahmed, 2004, p. 147) that society has dictated he feel. While heterosexual consultants may feel uncomfortable when feelings of attraction arise, or attraction may “negatively impact the session” as some participants in Wilde (2003) state, Ahmed (2004) would argue that this negative impact and possible accompanied

discomfort is very different and less threatening for the heterosexual consultant. Because heterosexual attraction is sanctioned by society writ large, the heterosexual consultant does not have to worry about the extremely dangerous consequences that could happen for violating societal norms (see Butler, 2004 quote above) as the LGBTQ consultant does. Additionally, because the heterosexual consultant does not have to worry about publicly showing signs of attraction out of fear of the consequences, they do not have to monitor and restrict the way in which their body is acting or physically expressing this attraction. To be clear, this is not to suggest that heterosexuals face no possible consequences for expressing attraction. For example, being rejected by someone you are interested in can cause severe emotional pain, and being accused of sexual harassment can have severe legal, economical, and emotional consequences. The consequences for LGBTQ people that I am talking about are more severe and even life threatening for actions that are as simplistic as walking down the street. Horrific examples of these consequences can be seen too often in news reports about the latest violent and even deadly hate crimes. So, it is not that there are not consequences for heterosexuals when it comes to expressing attraction, but that the consequences for LGBTQ people are potentially more physically violent. Thus, not only does the LGBTQ consultant, and in this example Harper, have to worry about their outward or public perception, they also have to work harder to regulate their internal or private self.

For Harper then, feeling attraction for Andrew violates the gender and sexual norms that have been consciously and unconsciously taught to him throughout his life. The moment this intense attraction (that questions heterosexuality) happens, is precisely the moment that a counterpublic space is invoked. This counterpublic space is pushing against and working to change the heteronormative gender expectations of the dominant society (the public) which gives

more value to male/female coupling. We can understand this clash of gender and sexual norms between the public and counterpublic as causing the extreme feelings of discomfort that Harper experienced throughout this initial session with Andrew. Ahmed (2004) would ask us to explicate this moment by arguing that:

“Discomfort is a feeling of disorientation: one’s body feels out of place, awkward, unsettled...Furthermore, queer subjects may also be ‘asked’ not to make heterosexuals feel uncomfortable by avoiding the display of signs of queer intimacy, which is itself an uncomfortable feeling, a restriction on what one can do with one’s body, and another’s body, in social space” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 148).

Thus, these counterpublic spaces position Harper in a double bind. Not only is his body made to feel uncomfortable for violating the heteronormative feelings it is having, he deeply understands that he should not express these feelings of same-sex attraction. An expression of these feelings could possibly make Andrew uncomfortable which would then violate Harper’s role as a professional tutor who is to accommodate the writers he works with. Thus, to be professional in this moment, and in other moments where he feels attraction Harper has to deny his body and its feelings in order to live up to an idealized, and heterosexualized notion of “professional.” As bell hooks mentions in the beginning of this chapter, denying and repressing bodily feelings and affects can have negative implications on mental health.

Even though this initial session was difficult for Harper, he made it through, and Andrew returned consistently throughout the rest of his college career. This constant exposure allowed Harper to track and reflect on how his feelings changed overtime:

“I’m always thinking this could be so helpful, this could be so helpful, but I’m also thinking, ‘ok I don’t want to say the wrong thing and then look stupid in front of them [male

clients], whereas that fear of looking stupid in front of my female clients is not there at all. Because it is like I'm not trying to impress them, but him, I'm trying to impress" (Harper).

The fact that he is "always thinking," or as he also says, "having racing thoughts" is just one way his consulting methods are changed when he feels attracted to the writer he works with. Attraction and its triggering of counterpublic spaces, causes Harper to frequently rely on internal dialogue before making decisions, and he also becomes as he says, "extremely introverted." This change in his personality from extroverted to more introverted, and the constant second guessing of his normal tutoring methods, causes his sessions to move more slowly and for him to talk less with the writer. Not only does experiencing attraction cause him to become more introverted, it causes changes in how he connects with the student:

"I realized what happened as he started to share more about himself; I started to share more about *myself* which is weird because it is usually the other way around. And that's when I started realizing like a lot of the things that are going on in my life, I can use as a means to help him understand what's going on in his" (Harper).

While Harper usually self-discloses information about himself first, in an attempt to make the student feel more comfortable, the counterpublic space triggered by the feeling of attraction flipped this dynamic. But as Andrew begin to share more personal details about himself over the two years they worked with each other, the more Harper felt comfortable sharing information about himself. But, because he attaches more fear and anxiety to coming out to straight men, Harper was always very hesitant about sharing his sexuality with Andrew. All of these factors that are attributed to feelings of attraction (uncomfort, introvertedness, change in session dynamics, fear of disclosing his sexuality to males he perceives as straight) ultimately change how Harper tutors and places more of the authority and control into the hands of the writer.

While writing center scholarship values empowering the writer and putting the session in the writer's control, for Harper feelings of attraction cause him to feel so powerless that he doesn't feel the necessary authority to point out when the writer is wrong. Somewhat jokingly, Harper reflects on this shifting power dynamic by sharing a maxim that could come from any of the dating guide books for girls in popular culture, or the movie *Mean Girls*: "You can't tell a cute guy that he's wrong, because he is not going to like you."

Ultimately, it took over a year of working with Andrew and developing a trusting relationship with him before Harper felt comfortable enough to come out to him: "And talking to him, I wouldn't say it was therapy, but it was kind of releasing that thought of 'Oh, I have to be a certain way because he's cute.' So after awhile, I think [Andrew] was very important because now when I work with clients, he could be cute all day long, you still came here for my help" (Harper).

This experience has made Harper feel more comfortable and confident in embracing his identities in sessions with other students whom he finds attractive, and has helped him to think about the complexities of interpersonal relationships in a pseudo-work environment. Harper told me:

"It took me a while to get really confident in who I am as a tutor and as a gay black man. That was really hard. It is just one of those things like the more I worked with Andrew, the more I self-disclosed, the more I shared my personal experiences, I was able to kind of gain that power back" (Harper).

Harper demonstrates some of the complexities that come with counterpublic spaces, such as feelings of extreme discomfort, loss of power and confidence, and constant identity negotiation. Developing an identity as a gay male professional and embodying a version of

professionalism that questions the heteronormative culture is an extremely difficult process. Harper has begun to negotiate this process by exploring what roles his sexuality can and should play in his identity as both a gay male *and* professional tutor. Traditionally, conversations about such charged professional issues as sexual harassment and workplace attraction have been focused on heterosexual engagements. For example, the horrific but all-too-common story of a male executive sexually harassing his female secretary is so powerful that it is displayed in countless popular television shows and movies. This powerful story, among numerous others, dictates, at least to a degree, the ways in which workplaces structure and think about which bodies will desire other bodies. Because of the prevalence and powerful discourses around heterosexuality, issues of LGBTQ sexuality and attraction have a hard time registering in the consciousness of bosses and human resource managers. Harper's story reminds us that we need to extend that conversation and provide more options for LGBTQ students to understand and discuss these issues.

Ultimately though, for Harper, embracing and embodying his identities is the only way he feels he can be an effective tutor: "Who I am plays a major role in how I help people. I don't think I would be working in the writing center if I hadn't gotten to the point where I could be as confident as I am." He also uses the awareness and embodiment of his own identities to help students become more mindful of their many identities, specifically their identity as a writer. For Harper, his role of empowering students as writers starts by embracing his own many identities, which he then uses to help clients to recognize their own.



## **Josiah & Brooke**

### **Attraction, Withhold, Uncomfortable**

While Harper actively worked to manage the uncomfortable clashes of gender and sexual norms that happened between the counterpublic spaces and public spaces he inhabited, Josiah actively worked to keep feelings of attraction from occurring at all. When these feelings do happen, Josiah sees this as being at odds with his role as a consultant, which as I mentioned in Chapter 3 is to make students feel comfortable. He states that: “I know that [expressing gender and sexuality] makes a lot of them uncomfortable so I try to back off from pushing that so that they can feel comfortable.” Because Josiah most often works to withhold his gender and sexual identity within the writing center, as I discussed in the last chapter, he also does the same with feelings of attraction. Josiah states that:

“I think I’m pretty good at switching that [attraction] off within the conference and just being able to be like you know focused on who they are without the exterior, you know, and trying to overlook that” (Josiah).

One way of understanding Josiah’s failure to engage with feelings of attraction is to understand the possible consequences that could occur from doing so. Not only could Josiah violate the gender expectations of the writer and overall university and writing center as a whole, he could also face mental and/or physical violence from the writer if he is perceived as being gay. We can understand this failure to even consider the possibilities of validating same-sex attraction in the writing center as just one of the ways in which heteronormativity actively dictates who bodies are supposed to be attracted to and how bodies are supposed to act. While Harper’s story, at least in the consultants I interviewed, is unique many of my participants’

understanding of the role of same-sex attraction is very similar to Josiah's. For example Brooke says that:

"I have been attracted to people in the center that I didn't know what their sexual orientation was, both tutors and fellow interns, but just in life I try not to let my sexuality get in the way of my work, what I am trying to do...I don't want to make anyone uncomfortable, and I don't want to be uncomfortable, so I don't try and put my ideas on anyone else to make them uncomfortable" (Brooke).

As this quote exemplifies, Brooke believes, as does Harper and Josiah, that feelings of same-sex attraction in the writing center, and what I am calling the counterpublics that these feelings trigger, is the antithesis of what it means to be professional and comfortable. But, while Josiah and Brooke work to separate themselves from these moments of attraction, Harper ultimately embraced and became more comfortable with feelings of attraction. By becoming more familiar with these moments, he was able to become more confident with his own gender and sexual identity and how that at times affects his work with writers.

### **Conclusion**

Josiah and Harper are different sides of the same coin, at least in how they navigate counterpublic spaces in their writing center which, like all other centers, universities, and hierarchical structures in general, are influenced by the logics of heteronormativity. For Josiah, his perceived job and role as a consultant, and his embodiment and expression of his gender and sexual identity, are at odds with each other. In efforts to ease the tension between the two, he constantly withholds and suppresses his gender and sexual identities while he is in the center. He discusses how he is good at "switching off" attraction and not focusing on the exterior of the person. Harper, on the other hand, does not believe he can tutor effectively if he does not

embody and embrace his gender and sexual identities. When the presence of a homophobic tutor caused him to change how he performed his gender and sexuality, Harper became cold and focused only on the text and not the writer. In fact, he uses his confidence in his identities, which he learned from this experience, to empower students to be more confident in their abilities and identities as writers. When he first experienced attraction during a writing center conference, Harper felt a loss of authority, constantly tried to impress the guy, did not address certain issues, became more introverted, and experienced racing thoughts. Eventually, Harper worked through those issues to see how his sense of himself, his personal identities, overlapped with his sense of himself as writing consultant. For Josiah and Harper, an awareness of gender and sexuality impacts how effectively they can perform as writing consultants, helping them to make connections (or disconnections) with student writers and other consultants. These interviews suggest that writing centers should pay greater attention to the specificity of LGBT experiences in writing center, not just as writers but also as consultants. More importantly though, as these discussions of same-sex attraction has shown, writing center professionals need to do more work to focus not only the way in which LGBTQ consultants are constantly marginalized, but also on ways in which we can begin to focus and center the bodies of LGBTQ consultants in their professional development training and centers as a whole. This active focus on the bodies of LGBTQ consultants, then, would begin to combat the ways in which LGBTQ bodies have been constantly overlooked in both tutor training, writing center research, and in our field as a whole.

## **Chapter 5: Creating Brave Spaces**

### **Introduction**

As I have shown throughout this thesis, the relationship between emotion/affect and gay male identity is complex, multifaceted, and both indirectly and directly impact the consulting methods of the gay male participants I interviewed. Particularly, I have sought to answer the following research questions: 1) How does experiencing shame or attraction in the context of a writing center session impact, if at all, the writing center session? 2) How can a queer theoretical reading of emotion/affect influence writing center work? To answer these questions, I interviewed 7 LGBTQ consultants during the fall 2014 semester. These interviews served as the basis for my analysis in chapters 3 and 4. This conclusion chapter serves two folds. First, it will summarize the results presented in Chapters 3 and 4 to synthesize how shame and attraction impact a writing center session (research question 1) and how a queer reading of emotion/affect influence the work of writing centers (research question 2). The second purpose of this chapter is to present a framework for writing center professionals to engage in professional development and conversations about LGBTQ consultant identities and the closely related emotions and queer concepts of shame, attraction, Working Closets, counterpublics, and professionalism.

Chapter 3 focused on how shame is intimately related to agency and action, and how gay male consultants' decisions to withhold or express gender and sexual identity in sessions directly impact the way they are able to work with writers. For Harper, at times, feelings of shame caused him to withhold or closet his identity, which made his consulting methods cold and focused solely on the text. At other times, Harper's experience with feeling shame prompted critical reflection and caused him to challenge the homophobic tutor he was working with. For Josiah,

feelings of shame caused him to mainly withhold his gender and sexual identity. This decision, to mainly closet his identity when presented with a Working Closet moment, shows how, for him, there was agency and power gained in determining when and to whom he was open about his gay male identity. While Harper found confidence in consulting while embracing his gay male identity, Josiah gained a sense of agency and confidence by strategically withholding his identity within the writing center. Josiah and Harper's experiences demonstrate that even within the same writing center, gay consultants strategically, and *individually*, make decisions that best fit their choice to be "out" in the writing center.

Chapter 4 considered same-sex attraction as a trigger for counterpublic spaces in the writing center. These counterpublic spaces challenged, and sometimes uncomfortably so, the heteronormative gender and sexual expectations of the writing center space. Most of the consultant's experiences that I included in Chapter 4 discussed how uncomfortable they felt when feelings of attraction occurred while they were supposed to be "professional." Consultants' definitions of professional seemed to come from an internal, normative perception of how they should behave. To challenge the heteronormative space of the writing center, I argue that writing center studies should begin to understand feelings of same-sex attraction as transformative because of the fact that they help center the often overlooked embodied experiences of LGBTQ consultants. While Brooke, Josiah, and Harper discussed the ways in which feelings of attraction felt at odds with their roles as professionals, Harper was the only consultant interviewed who had a sustained consulting relationship with someone who he found attractive. While initially the feelings of attraction and the counterpublic space it created were a bit paralyzing (made him have racing thoughts, made him more introverted, and made the sessions go slower), after two-years of working with the writer and eventually disclosing the fact

that he was gay, he was able to develop more confidence in his consulting abilities no matter the attractiveness of the writer. Part of the confidence that he developed occurred because after he disclosed the fact that he was gay, the writer accepted him and treated him no differently. My first research question, How does experiencing shame or attraction in the context of a writing center session impact, if at all, the writing center session?, can be answered by referring back to my coding scheme (Chapter 2) which guided my analysis in Chapters 3 and 4. Through my analysis of shame, I demonstrated that the affect of shame triggered both Harper and Josiah to act on their emotions. The most common actions they took were directly related to how they expressed or withheld their identities. When Harper withheld his gender and sexual identity, his sessions became cold and he only focused on the text. When he expressed his identities, he built rapport with the writer and focused on them as people/writers. Feelings of shame triggered Harper to both withhold his gender and sexual identity in the presence of the homophobic consultant, and at other times to express it in a way that challenged the homophobic consultant publicly at a staff meeting. Josiah, on the other hand, gained a sense of confidence and agency by withholding his gender and sexual identity.

Through my analysis of attraction, I demonstrated that same-sex attraction directly affected my participants by making them feel uncomfortable. For Harper, this discomfort made him more introverted when working with the writer, caused him to experience racing thoughts, made the session go much slower, and made him more unlikely to tell the writer when he was wrong. While Josiah did not have a particular story to tell about working with a writer he thought was attractive, he did reflect on how he tries not to let attractiveness even become an issue by actively not thinking about it. Actively avoiding finding someone attractive or denying it if it happened was necessary for Josiah because he was working in a role where he had to be a

professional. Thus, shame and attraction impact writing center sessions in multiple ways ranging from consciously (and unconsciously) shaping consultants' behaviors to placing an undue burden on LGBTQ consultants to perform a heteronormative professional standard.

My second research question, How can a queer theoretical reading of emotion/affect influence writing center work?, can be answered by returning to the queer analytical frameworks I used in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. In Chapter 3, I presented a queer understanding of shame that highlighted what it can tell us about ethics, agency, and relationship with other people. Along with this queer understanding of shame, I also discussed Working Closets and performativity. All three of these analytical frameworks (queer shame, Working Closets, and performativity) work together to suggest that queer theories can help writing centers better understand the complex ways that shame triggers consultants to either express or withhold their identity which then, depending on situational factors, have direct impacts and results on the sessions in which these shameful feelings occur. In Chapter 4, I discussed how feelings of same-sex attraction caused Michael Warner's queer concept of counterpublics to occur. In these counterpublics, heterosexual gender norms (the public) are brought into direct contact with the gay male consultants embodied feelings of attraction. This theoretical concept then, provides a way of beginning to understand why feelings of same-sex attraction, which is at odds with dominant society's heteronormative expectations (the public), may directly impact the consultants ability to work with writers as they normally would.

Understanding how particular affective feelings impact specific writing center consultations is useful for thinking about how particular emotions/affects trigger moments where identity is foregrounded which, as my data demonstrated, leads to specific actions by the consultants that then affect the consultation. Because of the recursive nature of affect/emotion in

writing center sessions, writing centers should discuss issues of shame, attraction, and LGBTQ identity within their writing centers. I believe such discussions would not only have benefitted Josiah and Harper as they navigated the tricky, emotionally-charged moments of identity negotiation, but also such discussions are vital for all consultants, writers, and writing center staff members. The rest of this conclusion presents one way of creating an atmosphere for these discussions to happen in writing centers. This Brave Space proposal relies on published literature (Arao & Clemens, 2013), Josiah and Harper's experiences (as reflected in Chapters 3 and 4), and my 3+ years of experience as both an undergraduate and graduate gay male writing center consultant. Taking the time to create brave spaces in our writing centers are truly important if we want to have important and critical conversations around LGBTQ issues.

### **Safe or Brave?**

One of the most prevalent discourses that shape thinking about LGBTQ issues is the idea of safe space. In fact, at universities across the nation Safe Zone training has become a main component of diversity training in relation to the LGBTQ community, and writing centers are just one campus group who have started to use this training program to help educate staff members. Herb and Perdue (2011), for example, discuss their writing center's Safe Zone training session and offer ideas for administrators to use to prepare and reflect on that training. At my own writing center, we too have had a member of campus' Safe Zone training program present on LGBTQ issues at a staff meeting. But is *safe* the best word to frame how writing centers should explore and discuss important LGBTQ issues, such as shame and same-sex attraction (or any other "risque" topics) with their staff?

Arao and Clemens (2013) reflect on this question in their chapter discussing issues of social justice training sessions and argue that:



“...authentic learning about social justice often requires the very qualities of risk, difficulty, and controversy that are defined as incompatible with safety. These kinds of challenges are particularly unavoidable in participant groups composed of target and agent group members. In such settings, target and agent group members take risks by participating fully and truthfully, though these risks differ substantially by group membership and which identities hold the most salience for a given participant at a given time” (p. 139).

For agent group members (in this case non-LGBTQ consultants), framing a conversation as safe does a disservice to them by not preparing them for the possible discomfort they may feel when exploring how they are at times complicit, whether intentionally or not, in oppressing target group members (LGBTQ consultants). Arao and Clements also discuss how requiring participants to adopt a safe attitude in these discussions can lead “to the replication of dominance and subordination, rather than a dismantling thereof” (p. 140). Thus, a safe mindset does not correspond with the sometimes painful, lived experiences that target group members have had, and does not necessarily prepare them for the full range of reactions their stories may produce in agent group members.

Instead of a safe space, Arao and Clemens argue that social justice training sessions should be brave spaces. By rethinking five common safe space assumptions, they propose five ground rules and/or questions to establish brave spaces:

1. Controversy with civility
2. Own your intentions and your impact
3. What keeps you from challenging yourself to engage in the conversation?

4. What is respectful discussion?
5. How do participants challenge without attacking?

Arao and Clemens allow participants agency in using the above principles and questions as a heuristic to think through and define the ground rules for a brave discussion. Once consultants and administrators have negotiated what the rules and boundaries of their brave space conversation will be, they should take the time to discuss, among other things, Working Closets, shame, counterpublics, attraction, and professionalism.

### **Working Closets**

As a gay person, I have become particularly adept at reading people--their body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, etc.--in order to determine what they might think of my non-normative sexual orientation and gender expression. During writing center sessions I have to rely on this skill to try and gauge exactly how the writer might react when or if my gender expression violates their heteronormative expectations. Once I get a read on the person, I adjust my performance of my identity to match the situation. While this all sounds like calculated decision making that I thoroughly think through, it is anything but. All this identity negotiating and reading of the other person happens quickly, often subconsciously, and mostly out of my own control. I articulate this, because it is just one example of a Working Closet moment a LGBTQ writing center consultant may navigate during a session. Another may be, as we saw with Harper and as I have experienced myself, verbally expressing to a writer that you are gay.

No matter the particular scenario, Working Closets are important to discuss with all members of a writing center staff during professional development for two reasons. First, Working Closets complicates, and realistically so, the binary in/out that most people understand the closet to be. The notion of Working Closets underscores the fact that coming out is not a one

time thing, but instead a complex and constant set of decisions LGBTQ people face. Thus, many LGBTQ people, “work” the closet by choosing the particular moments they want to be in, out, or anywhere in between. Second, conversations about Working Closets highlights the possible harmful emotional, verbal, and physical consequences that come with decisions of how to express one’s gender and sexual identity. While I have been placing the agency on the LGBTQ person to make these “decisions” it is important to remember that many aspects of how one expresses identity is uncontrollable and unconscious. While LGBTQ people can try to perform a particular way, like Harper trying to act more masculine, it does not mean they control the learned behaviors of their bodies or how other people will react to their bodies. So, regardless of the particular choice, and whether it is conscious or subconscious, LGBTQ people face a host of consequences when interacting with others who expect them to act in a way suitable to their heteronormative expectations.

## **Shame**

One of the possible consequences that I have referenced throughout this thesis is shame, and while it is an uncomfortable feeling, shame is deeply related to agency and as such can prompt meaningful reflection and action. Because thinking about shame in a positive way goes against common associations with the word, having consultants read Geller, Condon, and Carroll (2011), which use moments of shame to probe possible racism, would be an ideal way to have consultants rethink their understandings of the word. Harper’s decision to change his gender performance in the presence of the homophobic tutor, which I believe happened because of shameful feeling, caused him to explore and reflect on this uncomfortable and tension filled situation. By carefully and critically reflecting on these moments of shame and discomfort, Harper was able to recognize the importance his gender and sexual identity played in his ability

to effectively work with writers. Not only did he make personal change, he also made change in his writing center by discussing the homophobic tutor's actions at a staff meeting. Thus, administrators and consultants should reflect, through verbal discussion or journaling, moments of shame around LGBTQ issues because this reflection could possibly reveal how heteronormativity and homophobia are finding their ways into sessions and centers as a whole. These reflections should not merely attempt to identify challenges to LGBTQ consultants, but as Harper's reflection did, they should seek solutions and change.

### **Attraction and Counterpublics**

As my recounting of Josiah and Harper's experiences of attraction and the counterpublic spaces it triggers shows they both deal with and think about attraction differently. Josiah says he can very easily ignore it, while for Harper experiencing attraction during the session directly affected his ability to tutor. While discussing attraction with a large group of staff members can seem a bit risqué or reckless, the real issue is *not* talking about it. By not making the subject a part of larger professional development conversations, administrators unknowingly send a very clear message to their staff: that topic is not worthy of conversation and thus has no place in our center. For both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ consultants, this silencing by omission could negatively affect their ability to effectively process and respond to feelings of attraction when and if they arise during a session. And, as Harper's example shows, this inability to deal with attraction in the writing center negatively affected his skills as a tutor. For the LGBTQ consultant, though, this unspoken message about attraction could very much remind them of times and spaces in their lives where they have to repress their gender and sexual identity. Having to deny parts of one's identity and push it aside for work, is unhealthy mentally and at odds with the welcoming environment that administrators want to create for both consultants and

writers. Thus, I think creating a space for attraction to be discussed during professional development will help create better prepared writing consultants and a more welcoming environment for LGBTQ people.

### **Professionalism**

In this thesis, I have been trying to push at and expanding the thinking of the field of writing center studies to include real issues LGBTQ consultants are facing. I did this by mainly focusing on the experiences of gay male consultants. By doing so I have been interrogating the very meaning of “writing consultant” or “writing tutor,” or to think about it another way, what it means to be a professional writing consultant. Acting professional, for many directors and consultants, is one of the most important parts of the work we do. I know, when I began in the writing center, it was emphasized that this experience of working with students one-on-one, conducting workshops, and presenting to classes was one of professionalization. It is hard to recall what I thought of when I heard that this was a “professional” opportunity. Maybe a process I would undergo to become more business-like. A process that would help prepare me for a career. In other ways, professional connotes, at least to me, being dispassionate, rational, objective. It sounds sterile, and not emotional. What can we make of Josiah’s experience of downplaying his gender and sexual identity while in the writing center, but being “out and proud” (which I remind you is full of emotion) when not at work? He cites issues of professionalism and making others comfortable for the main reasons why he withholds or closets parts of his identity. Thus, it seems that for whatever reason, Josiah has come to understand professionalism as something that does not include his gendered and sexual self. That is, his understanding of professionalism is rooted in heterosexuality. I think that captures very much what I understand--or did--professionalism to be. And, it is not just Josiah who has this view of

professionalism, but our culture at large--a heteronormative culture where the primary image of professional is a white, cisgender, heterosexual man coming home to his white, cisgender, heterosexual wife after a long day's work at the office. Any writing center administrator or consultant who sees how exclusionary and oppressive a heterosexual definition of professionalism is to everyone, should thus create a brave space for a conversation to be had around what definition of professionalism their particular writing center is going to operate off of. By paying careful attention to the ideologies that inform what can seem to be such a simple word as "professional" writing centers can continue, or begin, depending on your campus, to operate as a site of social justice on college campuses everywhere. A site where the role of professional is inclusive of everyone, and is indeed emotional.

### **Conclusion**

As everything does, cultures, communities, and people change. This is nowhere less true than with the LGBTQ community today, and with the small percentage of this community that work everyday across the globe in writing centers. While LGBTQ writing center administrators, allies, professors, directors, and researchers have helped begin important discussions that contribute to the ongoing goal of socially-just centers, it is now time to begin listening to and learning from the stories and experiences of today's LGBTQ consultants who know better than anyone the issues they face. In this line of thought, this thesis tried to foreground and take serious the experiences of two gay male consultants and smaller moments from other LGBTQ consultants, in efforts to rethink how gendered and sexual identities and performances inform what it means to be a LGBTQ writing center consultant. More importantly though, this thesis took serious the affective, emotional, and embodied realities of two gay male consultants. It did not make these experiences an afterthought in a concluding paragraph or brief footnote, but it

centered the gay male consultants and their bodies in efforts to demonstrate what the field of writing center studies can learn if it begins to listen to instead of marginalize queer experience. This exploratory study did not include the experiences of any lesbian, bisexual, or transgender consultants, nor did it specifically focus on any females or issues of intersectionality. These are the issues that our researchers and writers should explore to further address how writing centers can become truly inclusive and welcoming to all people.

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## APPENDIX A: IRB Letter



### EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

#### University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office

4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682

600 Moyer Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 · [www.ecu.edu/irb](http://www.ecu.edu/irb)

## Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: [Rexford Rose](#)

CC:

[Nicole Caswell](#)

Date: 10/14/2014

Re: [UMCIRB 14-001822](#)

The Effects of Gender and Sexual Identities/Performances in Writing Center Consultations

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 10/14/2014 to 10/13/2015. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category #6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Demographic Survey	Data Collection Sheet
Demographic Survey	Surveys and Questionnaires
Informed Consent	Consent Forms
Queer Interview	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Recruitment Documents	Recruitment Documents/Scripts



The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

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IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418  
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

